

KNOX PROMISE: FINAL REPORT

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Executive Summary

For the last 10 years, Tennessee Promise has guaranteed tuition and fees for every high school graduate enrolling directly into a two-year community or technical college in the state. Starting in 2019, Knox Promise supplemented Promise's tuition support with additional coaching for Promise students from Knox County, as well as access to need-based grants to cover expenses like food, transportation, books and supplies, and housing.

This is the final Boyd Center report in a series that describes the progress of Knox Promise students through college and into the workforce. Selected findings include:

- Three years after starting college, 34% of Knox Promise students have earned a postsecondary certificate or degree. This compares favorably with 20% credential completion for other first-time freshmen in two-year schools.
- 29% of Knox Promise students earned an associate's degree within three years, which is close to the 35% six-year degree completion rate for all Tennessee community college students.
- When they were in 12th grade, 77% of Knox Promise students reported that they planned to someday transfer to a four-year university. Three years after starting college, 21% of transfer hopefuls were enrolled in a four-year university. Although this is much lower than their initial aspirations, it is approaching three times the rate of four-year enrollment for other students who started college in two-year schools.
- Students who connected three or more times with Knox Promise coaches in their first semester were 44% likely to have completed a college credential within three years, compared to just 15% for students with 0-2 first-semester coach connections.
- Students who received completion grant aid in their first semester were 84% likely to be eligible for low-income Pell grants, and 42% likely to be first-generation college students. Despite these disadvantages, grant recipients were also more likely than other Knox Promise students to earn a college credential within three years (42% versus 33%) and were about as likely to remain enrolled and in pursuit of a credential at that time (13% versus 14%).
- Knox Promise college completers were more likely than other two-year completers to work in Tennessee after three years, but with lower average earnings and jobs in lower-paying industries. The three-year time horizon is too short to assess the labor market return on investment in Knox Promise, since they stay in college for longer than other students, on average, and are more likely to have four-year degree plans.

Section 1 introduces the Knox Promise program and briefly sketches how students access coaching and completion grants. Section 2 describes data used in this report. Section 3 reviews findings. Subsections in Section 3 describe Knox Promise students before college, their overall postsecondary and workforce outcomes, outcomes by level of engagement with first-term coaching and completion grants, and longer-term outcomes for tnAchieves students who enrolled before 2019. Section 4 concludes and offers directions for follow-on research.



Section 1: Background

Knox Promise Timeline

Knox Promise launched in 2019 as a pilot program for Knox County students participating in Tennessee Promise, the state’s “free community college” program for new high school graduates. Tennessee Promise is a last-dollar scholarship that covers the gap between required tuition and fees, and a student’s other sources of grant and scholarship aid. Knox Promise is managed by tnAchieves, a nonprofit organization that partners with Tennessee Promise and acts as the main point of contact for Tennessee Promise students. Knox Promise supplements the Tennessee Promise tuition grant with additional grants for non-tuition, non-academic, or emergency expenses (“completion grants”) and college coaches who connect with students several times a year. In 2022, coaching and completion grants expanded statewide through tnAchieves COMPLETE.

Completion Coaches

Each Knox Promise student works with a tnAchieves completion coach, who proactively reaches out several times per term to discuss progress through classes, help plan for future terms, and advise on any challenges that students encounter. Completion coaches are also available for reactive support when students reach out to them on these and other topics. Coaches use multiple modes of contact, and according to program records, 50% of connection attempts were successful. The most common topics of discussion were enrollment advising (11%), campus and class issues (22%), and general catching up (32%).

Completion Grants

Completion grants help to meet non-tuition needs that are not covered by Tennessee Promise. Many Tennessee Promise students do not have a last-dollar tuition obligation, particularly lower-income students with Pell grants worth more than tuition and fees. Completion grants are available to Pell eligible Knox Promise students who are in good standing with the program and in regular contact with their completion coaches. Students can apply for completion grants as needs arise, receiving up to \$1,500 per term. In program records, the most common categories of need were for groceries (44%), transportation (43%), computers (5%), and textbooks (4%). Typical grants were \$100 for grocery and transportation requests, \$299 for computers, and \$197 for textbooks.

Related Research

Carruthers et al. (2023) described the first 1-2 years of college for the 2019 and 2020 Knox Promise cohorts, finding that 53% of program students earned a credential within 2 years or were still enrolled in college at that time. Knox Promise students who were more engaged with program supports tended to do better, which is consistent with findings below as well as results from other research groups and other research designs (Kim et al., 2023; Dickason et al., 2024). Carruthers et al. (2023) also described postsecondary progress for participants in Nashville GRAD, a similar program for Tennessee Promise students at Nashville State Community College and TCAT Nashville. The 2020 Nashville GRAD cohort compared favorably with two-year college students statewide in terms of first-year college credits, GPA, and credential completion.



Carruthers and Pratt (2023) focused on Knox Promise students and extended the timeline of the earlier report and described college outcomes for the first three cohorts, up to three years after they initially enrolled. They again showed that students who connected more often with coaches did better in college, and that completion grant recipients did at least as well as other program participants. Just over one-third (34%) of the 2019 cohort attained a college certificate or degree within three years, and another 15% were still enrolled and pursuing their first credential after three years.

The first two reports presented descriptive profiles of Knox Promise students, with an emphasis on how coaching and completion grant receipt related to persistence through college and credential completion. Program supports—and coaching, in particular—were consistently associated with better post-secondary outcomes, but that does not mean that Knox Promise initiatives directly caused better outcomes. Looking ahead to Table 1, students who had more conversations with their coaches were also more academically prepared for college or more likely to have college-educated parents. These other factors may have been responsible for their success in college rather than their engagement with Knox Promise coaches. On the other hand, completion grant recipients tended to be lower income and had lower ACT scores. Those pre-existing factors may have worked against the beneficial effects of grants, explaining why grant recipients had about the same level of success as other students.

Carruthers and Pratt (2024b) begin to get at more causal identification of the effect of Knox Promise coaching and grants. They showed that previously documented relationships between coaching and college outcomes were robust to controls for student ACT, Pell eligibility, demographic indicators, and first-generation status.

Carruthers and Pratt (2024a) take a step further and identify the effect of a quasi-experiment in Knox Promise-style coaching and completion grants. Specifically, they evaluate the 2022 expansion from Knox Promise to Tennessee COMPLETE. In that year, eligibility for coaching and completion grants extended from Knox County tAchieves students to Pell-eligible students throughout the state. Carruthers and Pratt (2024a) compare fall-to-fall persistence rates between Pell-eligible and Pell-ineligible students before and after expansion. These simultaneous comparisons (across students with different levels of income in the same cohort, and across students in different cohorts with the same level of income) increase confidence that results are causal effects of Knox Promise coaching and completion grant eligibility. Carruthers and Pratt (2024a) estimate that for students very close to the Pell eligibility line, an average amount of engagement with COMPLETE supports could have increased fall-to-fall persistence rates by 12 percentage points (15% of the average).

This final report returns to the descriptive lens and concludes the series with statistics on postsecondary outcomes for the first four Knox Promise cohorts up to three years after they started college, as well as an early look at workforce outcomes for the 2019 and 2020 cohorts three years after they started college. As in earlier reports, key results are broken down by first-semester grant receipt and the number of first-semester coach connections.



Section 2: Data

Data for this report come from two sources: tnAchieves (a nonprofit organization that manages Knox Promise) and Tennessee’s P-20 student longitudinal data system (“TN DATA”). De-identified Knox Promise program data from tnAchieves include lists of participating students, completion grant requests and receipt, and data on the type and frequency of connections between Knox Promise students and completion coaches (in-person meetings, virtual meetings, text messages, etc.).

Participant lists and program details are merged with statewide administrative TN DATA records that connect post-secondary and workforce outcomes. TN DATA records include college enrollment by term and institution, GPA, credits attempted and earned, certificate/degree receipt, and degree field. These outcomes are limited to public in-state institutions—TCATs, community colleges, and 4-year universities. Workforce outcomes include employment, earnings, and industry for any Tennessee employer covered by Unemployment Insurance. Matched postsecondary and workforce outcomes cover the time period from high school graduation through the summer term and second quarter of 2023.

Most of the results to follow describe outcomes for four cohorts of Knox Promise students who started college in fall 2019, fall 2020, fall 2021, or fall 2022. Post-secondary outcomes of interest include college persistence from one term to the next, grade point averages (GPA), credit completion, transfer, credential completion, and degree field. Additional findings describe workforce outcomes during and shortly after college: employment, earnings, and industry. Knox Promise program participants are compared with statewide cohorts of other first-time freshmen in two-year schools, or for some results, with statewide cohorts of 12th grade Tennessee Promise applicants.

Not enough time has passed to evaluate labor market outcomes for Knox Promise students beyond the three-year window. After reviewing updated results for Knox Promise students, the analysis shifts to focus on earlier cohorts of tnAchieves applicants and enrollees who graduated in 2017 or 2018. Their postsecondary and workforce engagement over the 4-6 years after high school may give us a preview of what to expect from Knox Promise students.

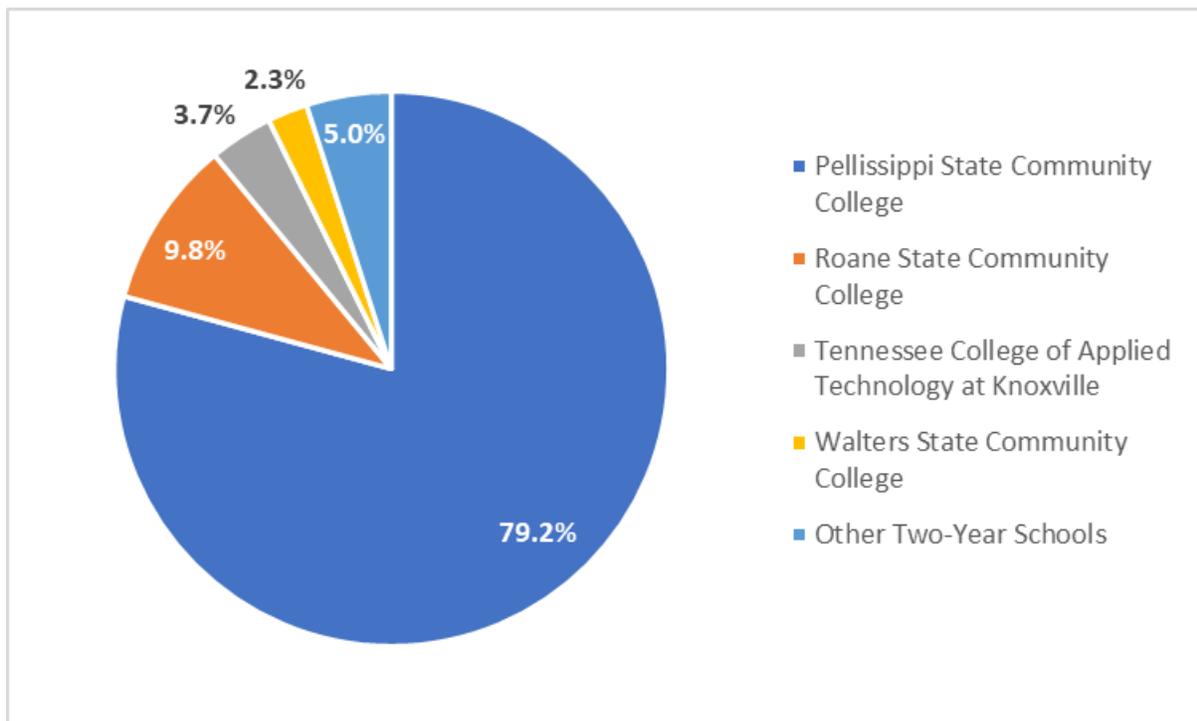


Section 3: Results

Knox Promise Student Profile

Knox Promise program records describe 5,443 students from the classes of 2019 – 2022. The focus of this report is on those who enrolled in two-year Tennessee community and technical colleges beginning in the fall after high school graduation. This excludes about 11% of Knox Promise students who enrolled in eligible private or 4-year institutions, or who started college after the fall term, as well as a small number who could not be matched to unique individuals in TN DATA administrative records. Among two-year college Knox Promise students, 79% enrolled in Pellissippi State Community College, 10% enrolled in Roane State Community College, 4% enrolled in TCAT Knoxville, and 2% enrolled in Walters State Community College (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1. Knox Promise students' first institution



Source: Author's calculations, using tnAchieves program records merged to statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data. The sample is limited to Knox Promise students, entering classes of 2019 – 2022, who enrolled in in-state public two-year colleges, omitting a small percentage who enrolled in Promise-eligible associate programs in private and four-year schools.



Table 1 describes Knox Promise students from each cohort, and for comparison, other 2019 – 2022 high school graduates who enrolled in Tennessee community and technical colleges as first-time freshmen in the fall term. Knox Promise students were less likely to be recorded as Black or Hispanic than two-year college students elsewhere in the state, although there is a large percentage of students with missing race information in TN DATA administrative records. Nonetheless, Knox County as a whole tends to be less racially diverse, so it is reasonable that the same would be true for Knox Promise students.¹ Women accounted for a slim majority of Knox Promise students for three out of the four cohorts.

Academically, Knox Promise students had higher ACT scores than other students, with composite scores of 19-20, on average, rather than 18. Before COVID, 45% of Knox Promise students had family income that qualified them for need-based Pell grants. This fell to 37-42% for the 2020 and 2021 COVID cohorts, when lower-income students were less likely to enroll in college, and then rose to 43% for the class of 2022. Consistent with this pattern, Knox Promise students' average expected family contribution ("EFC," a federally determined measure of ability to pay for college) rose between 2020 and 2021 and fell between 2021 and 2022.

Table 2 reports demographic, ACT, and socioeconomic profiles for four different groups of Knox Promise students. Breakouts are along two dimensions of program engagement: The number of first-semester connections with coaches and receipt of a first-semester completion grant. Knox Promise students who connected with their coaches 0-2 times in their first semester (which is below average) were somewhat more likely to be Black, and 5 percentage points more likely to be male. Low-connection students are also more likely to be eligible for need-based Pell grants, and they had lower EFC than Knox Promise students with 3+ first-term connections. The two groups were more similar in terms of average ACT and first-generation status.

¹ In 2020, 79.2% of the Knox County population and 72.2% of the Tennessee population was white, non-Hispanic, versus 72.2% of Tennessee (<https://arcg.is/OeWzy8>).



Table 1. Knox Promise Participants: Demographic and socioeconomic summary statistics

	2019 Knox Promise Enrollees	2020 Knox Promise Enrollees	2021 Knox Promise Enrollees	2022 Knox Promise Enrollees	Other 2019 - 2022 First-Time Freshmen in TCATs and Community Colleges
Black or African-American	9.1%	8.9%	6.3%	8.7%	21.8%
Hispanic	6.8%	7.4%	8.0%	8.1%	9.5%
White	75.6%	75.9%	76.2%	72.7%	58.4%
Other or Unknown Race	15.3%	15.2%	17.6%	18.5%	19.9%
Female	49.3%	52.0%	50.6%	51.4%	52.8%
ACT Score	20.2	19.9	19.4	19.1	18.0
First Generation	30.8%	29.0%	26.1%	28.4%	
Pell Grant Eligible	45.3%	42.4%	37.2%	43.3%	
Expected Family Contribution	14,286	15,966	19,343	17,923	
Number of matched students	1,274	1,266	1,166	1,143	14,613

Source: Author’s calculations using tnAchieves program records and statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data on all first-time freshmen in two-year, in-state public colleges. Demographic indicators and composite ACT are from TN DATA records. First-generation status, Pell eligibility, and expected family contribution are from Knox Promise program records. Expected family contribution statistics exclude the top 1%. Years refer to high school graduating class and the year of (fall) college enrollment.



Table 2. Knox Promise participants: Demographic and socioeconomic summary statistics by take-up of coaching and completion grants

	Knox Promise Enrollees with 3+ First Term Coach Connections	Knox Promise Enrollees with 0-2 First-Term Coach Connections	Knox Promise Enrollees with 1+ First-Term Completion Grant	Knox Promise Enrollees without First-Term Completion Grant
Black or African-American	7.7%	9.3%	16.3%	7.3%
Hispanic	7.8%	7.0%	13.7%	6.8%
White	75.4%	74.6%	57.9%	77.3%
Other or Unknown Race	16.9%	16.0%	25.8%	15.4%
Female	52.4%	47.7%	62.4%	49.4%
ACT Score	19.8	19.4	18.1	19.9
First Generation	28.2%	29.4%	42.1%	27.0%
Pell Grant Eligible	40.9%	44.5%	84.1%	36.9%
Expected Family Contribution	17,123	16,136	3,684	18,435
Number of matched students	3,201	1,648	534	4,315

Source: Author’s calculations using tnAchieves program records and statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data on all first-time freshmen. Demographic indicators and composite ACT are from TN DATA records. First-generation status, Pell eligibility, and expected family contribution are from Knox Promise program records. Expected family contribution statistics exclude the top 1%. The sample is limited to Knox Promise students, entering classes of 2019 – 2022, who enrolled in in-state public two-year colleges, omitting a small percentage who enrolled in Promise-eligible associate programs in private and four-year schools.



Knox Promise students who received first-semester grants were much more likely than other students to be Black or Hispanic (14-16% versus 7%). Grant recipients were 13 percentage points more likely to be female, and they tended to have lower ACT scores. Grant recipients had lower EFCs than other students and were much more likely to be Pell eligible (84% versus 37%), which makes sense given the need-based purpose of completion grants. Grant recipients were also 42% first generation, compared with 27% for other Knox Promise students.

Table 2 profiles are important to keep in mind for results to follow, and how grant receipt and the rate of first-term connections relate to student progress through college. Students who engaged more with their coaches were somewhat more socioeconomically advantaged, whereas grant recipients appeared to have sizable academic and socioeconomic disadvantages.

Knox Promise Postsecondary Outcomes

The next set of results describes persistence through college, credential receipt, major, credit completion, and GPA for 2019 – 2022 Knox Promise students 1-3 years after starting college. For comparison, tables and figures in this section report these same postsecondary outcomes for other first-time freshmen who graduated from high school in 2019 – 2022, and who immediately enrolled in Tennessee two-year community and technical colleges.

Figure 2 shows that 58% of Knox Promise students re-enrolled for a second year of college, and 5% had already attained a postsecondary credential by that time. By contrast, 38% of other students re-enrolled for a second year, and another 7% had earned a credential. Three years after enrolling, 34% of Knox Promise students earned a postsecondary certificate or degree, and another 14% were still enrolled. This compares favorably with 20% credential completion and 13% persistence for other two-year students.

34% of Knox Promise students earned a postsecondary credential within three years, versus 20% of other students who started in two-year colleges.

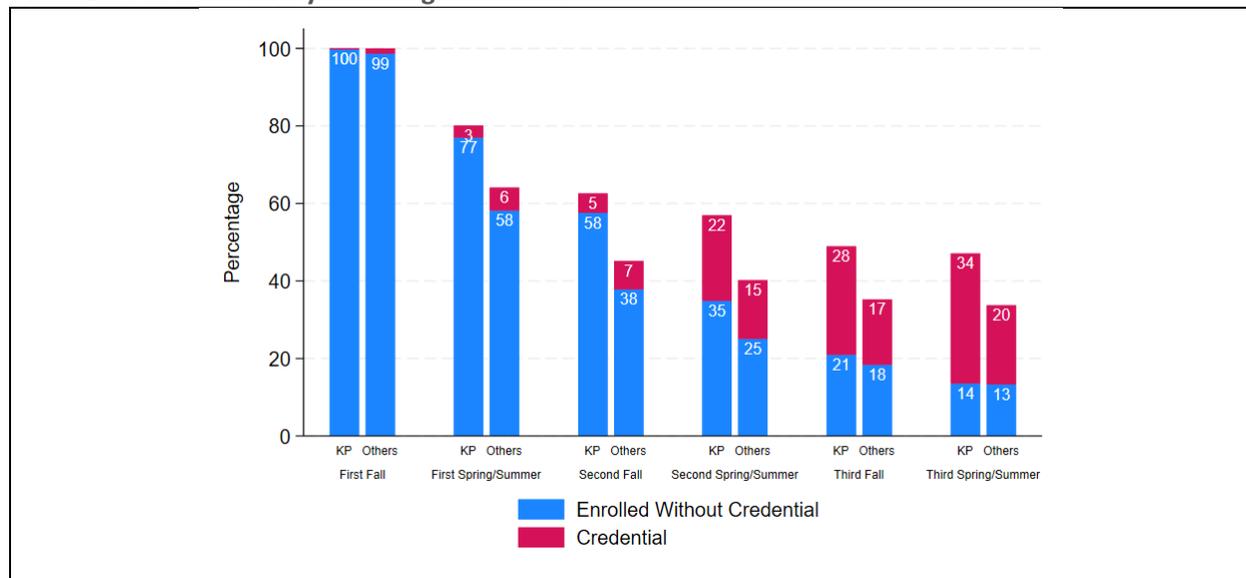
For some cohorts, tnAchieves program records include student responses to questions about their plans after college. **Table 3** summarizes student plans for the 2019 and 2022 classes, separately for Knox Promise students, Knox Promise students by gender, other tnAchieves students, and other tnAchieves *applicants*. Students in the last column applied for tnAchieves in their senior year of high school, but either did not complete pre-enrollment program requirements (apply for federal financial aid, meet with mentors, and volunteer for 8 hours in their community), or did not enroll in a Promise-eligible two-year college or associate degree program.

Over three quarters of Knox Promise students indicated that they planned to transfer to a four-year university after attending a two-year college, versus about two-thirds of tnAchieves students elsewhere in the state and only one-third of other tnAchieves applicants. Women were somewhat more likely than men to have four-year degree aspirations, and about half as likely to be unsure of their post-Promise



plans (4% versus 8%). About 1 in 5 ineligible tnAchieves applicants did not know what their plans were, and another 1 in 6 noted that enrolling in a two-year program through Tennessee Promise was their backup plan.

Figure 2. After three years, 34% of Knox Promise students earned a college credential, compared with 20% of other two-year college students.



Source: Author’s calculations, using tnAchieves program records merged to statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data. The sample is limited to Knox Promise students, entering classes of 2019 – 2022 (“KP”), who enrolled in in-state public two-year colleges, compared with other students in the classes of 2019 – 2022 who enrolled in the same schools (“Others”). Credential recipients who re-enrolled are grouped with other credential recipients.

Table 4 breaks out the third-year credential and enrollment status from Figure 2 in more detail, for all Knox Promise students, key subgroups, other first-time freshmen, tnAchieves enrollees from outside of Knox County, and ineligible tnAchieves applicants. The 34% of Knox Promise students with college credentials after three years comes from 7% with a certificate and 29% with an associate’s degree (including a small percentage with both). This 29% associate attainment rate approaches the 35% six-year degree completion rate for all Tennessee community colleges, which includes associate’s and bachelor’s degree receipt (THEC, 2025). With 32% of Knox Promise students still enrolled in Tennessee higher education (including 14% without their first credential, from Figure 2), program participants are likely to meet or exceed the statewide average graduation rate.

Table 4 also shows that among Knox Promise students, those who aspired to attain a four-year degree (“Transfer Intending”) were more likely to complete an associate’s degree and enroll in a four-year school within three years. Students who engaged more with tnAchieves coaches in their first semester, or who received a completion grant in that term, were also more likely than others to earn college credentials and move into four-year schools. Nearly 40% of students with 3 or more first-semester coaching connections earned an associate’s degree within 3 years, by which time 23% were enrolled in a four-year school. Grant recipients started college with large economic disadvantages (Table 2) but were nonetheless 10% likely to have a certificate within 3 years, 33% likely to have an associate’s degree, and 16% likely to have transferred to a four-year school.



Table 3. Plans after two-year college completion

	Knox Promise students	Knox Promise students: females	Knox Promise students: males	Other tnAchieves students	Other tnAchieves applicants
Enter the workforce	26.7%	27.2%	26.0%	36.7%	30.5%
Transfer to a four-year university	76.6%	79.2%	74.0%	64.9%	33.3%
I do not know my plans yet	6.0%	4.3%	7.9%	7.5%	20.4%
N/A (Tennessee Promise is my backup plan)	2.7%	3.1%	2.3%	4.0%	16.7%
Other plans or missing	0.7%	0.5%	0.9%	0.7%	5.5%
Number of 2019 and 2022 students	2,663	1,377	1,286	28,142	26,606

Sources: Author's calculations using tnAchieves program records. The table reports student responses to questions about post-college plans. Data in this table are limited to the 2019 and 2022 Knox Promise classes, when responses to this question were well populated. Percentages in each column add up to more than 100% because students indicated their post-college plans multiple times each year, whenever they logged community service time.

Table 4. Postsecondary status after three years

	Certificate	Associate's Degree	Enrolled in a TN college or university	Enrolled in a four-year school
1. All Knox Promise Enrollees	7.3%	29.4%	32.4%	17.1%
1a. Transfer Intending	4.1%	32.0%	36.7%	20.6%
1b. Not Transfer Intending	9.4%	27.7%	29.5%	14.7%
1c. Had 3+ First-Term Coach Connections	8.8%	39.6%	40.5%	22.8%
1d. Had 0-2 First-Term Coach Connections	4.7%	12.1%	18.5%	7.3%
1e. Had First-Term Completion Grant	10.2%	32.8%	34.4%	15.6%
1f. Did Not Have First-Term Completion Grant	7.1%	29.2%	32.3%	17.2%
2. Other First-Time Freshmen Enrolling in Two-Year Schools	11.0%	10.5%	21.2%	7.7%
3. Other tnAchieves students	13.8%	22.9%	27.6%	14.2%
4. Other tnAchieves applicants	3.0%	0.9%	26.6%	22.1%

Source: Author's calculations using tnAchieves program records and statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data on all first-time freshmen. The sample for rows 1-2 is limited to Knox Promise students, entering classes of 2019 – 2022, who enrolled in in-state public two-year colleges, compared with other students in the classes of 2019 – 2022 who enrolled in the same schools. Row 3 describes other tnAchieves students in the 2019 – 2022 classes, and row 4 describes 2019 – 2022 tnAchieves applicants who lost eligibility for failing to meet 12th grade FAFSA, mentoring, or community service requirements.



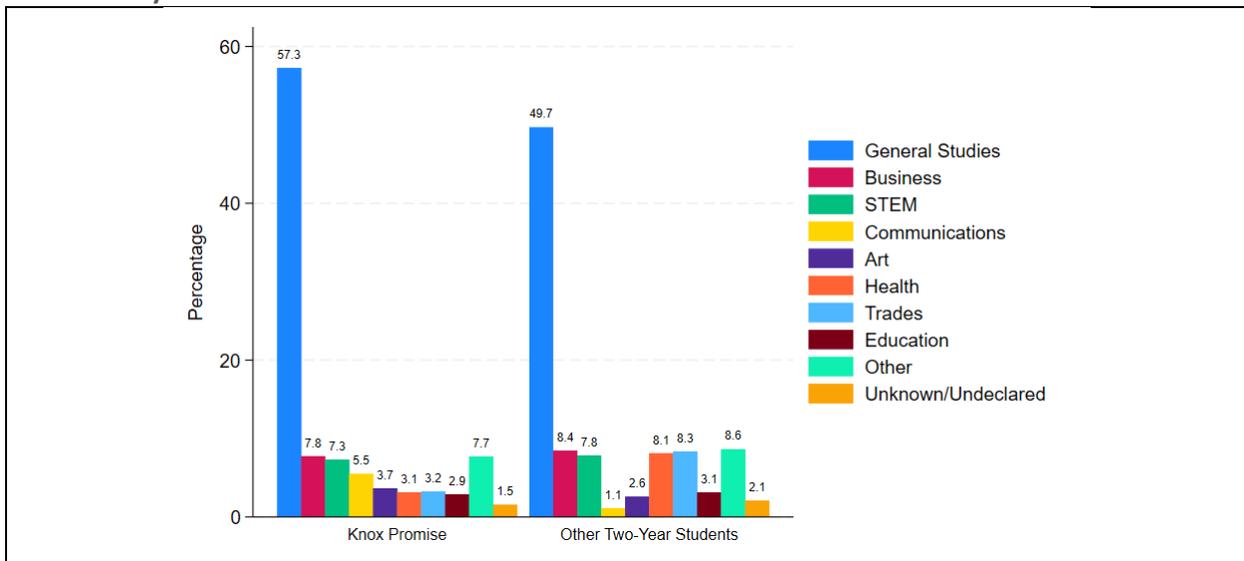
Knox Promise students were more likely to earn associate degrees than other two-year college students, and more likely to transfer to a four-year college.

Recall from Figure 2 that 20% of other first-time freshmen in two-year colleges attained a postsecondary credential within 3 years. Table 4 shows that this breaks down almost evenly into 11% with a certificate and 11% with an associate’s degree. Knox Promise students had a lower certificate attainment rate but were almost 3 times as likely as other first-time freshmen to earn associate’s degrees. Knox Promise students were also more than twice as likely as other first-time freshmen to transfer to a four-year college or university in Tennessee (17% versus 8%).

The last row of Table 4 focuses on other tnAchieves applicants, who lost eligibility due to 12th grade requirements or who pursued paths other than two-year college enrollment after high school. Given this background, it makes sense that this population is very unlikely to have completed a two-year credential within 3 years, and is somewhat more likely than Knox Promise students to be enrolled in a four-year school at the three-year mark (22% versus 17%).

Figure 3 illustrates the college majors that 2019 – 2022 Knox Promise students chose (left panel), and for comparison, the distribution of majors for other first-time freshmen in two-year schools (right panel). For both, figures represent the last observed major. The majority of Knox Promise students (57%) and about half of other students were in Liberal Arts and General Studies. This major is largely limited to two-year schools and is designed to facilitate transfer to a four-year college or university. Given that Knox Promise students were more likely to report transfer plans than other students (Table 3), it makes sense they were also more likely to have a major consistent with those plans.

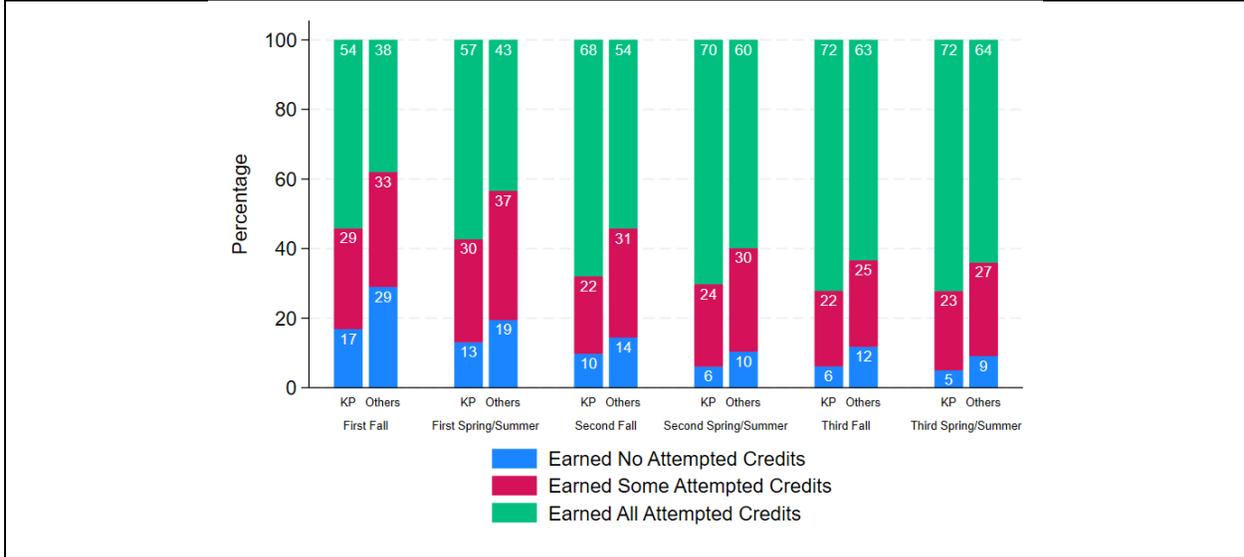
Figure 3. Knox Promise Students were more likely to major in Liberal Arts and General Studies than other two-year students



Source: Author’s calculations, using tnAchieves program records merged to statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data. The sample is limited to Knox Promise students, entering classes of 2019 – 2022 (“Knox Promise”), who enrolled in in-state public two-year colleges, compared with other students in the classes of 2019 – 2022 who enrolled in the same schools (“Other Two-Year Students”).

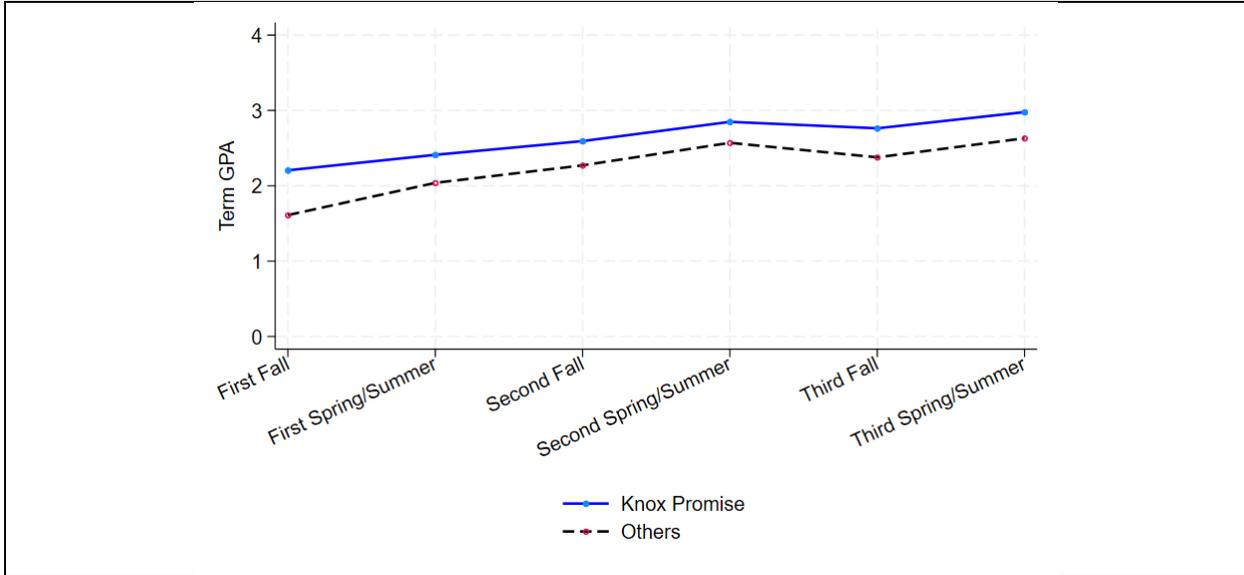


Figure 4. Knox Promise students were more likely than others to earn all attempted credits, and less likely to earn none of their attempted credits.



Source: Author’s calculations, using tnAchieves program records merged to statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data. The sample is limited to Knox Promise students, entering classes of 2019 – 2022 (“KP”), who enrolled in in-state public two-year colleges, compared with other students in the classes of 2019 – 2022 who enrolled in the same schools (“Others”).

Figure 5. Knox Promise students had slightly better grades than other students



Source: Author’s calculations, using tnAchieves program records merged to statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data. The sample is limited to Knox Promise students, entering classes of 2019 – 2022 (“Knox Promise”), who enrolled in in-state public two-year colleges, compared with other students in the classes of 2019 – 2022 who enrolled in the same schools (“Others”).



One measure of postsecondary success is the rate at which students complete all of the credits they attempt in a term. Failure to complete all credits might be from stopping out mid-semester, receiving a failing grade, or dropping a class mid-semester. Knox Promise coaching and completion grants are meant to counter each of those outcomes. Coaches, for example, can help students build a manageable schedule, and completion grants are intended to help students persist through small financial disruptions that might otherwise lead to stop-out. **Figure 4** shows that Knox Promise students were more likely than other students to complete all attempted credits over the first three years of college, and less likely to complete no attempted credits. For both groups of students, credit completion rates grew over time, likely from experience and the fact that students who were more successful with coursework were also inherently more likely to persist into a third year. Third-year Knox Promise students were 72% likely to complete all attempted credits, compared with 63-64% of other students.

Figure 5 illustrates one explanation for why Knox Promise students were more likely to complete all attempted credits: They tended to have better grades than other students over the first three years of college. First-semester term GPAs were just over 2.0, on average, for Knox Promise students. This meets the federal threshold required to keep need-based Pell grants and also satisfies Knox Promise and tAchieves program requirements. Other first-time freshmen in two-year schools had grades just under the 2.0 mark in their first semester, on average. Term GPAs for both groups steadily improved over time. As with **Figure 4** and completed credits, this is likely a function of student experience as well as attrition from lower-performing students.

Knox Promise Postsecondary Outcomes by First-Semester Engagement with Coaching

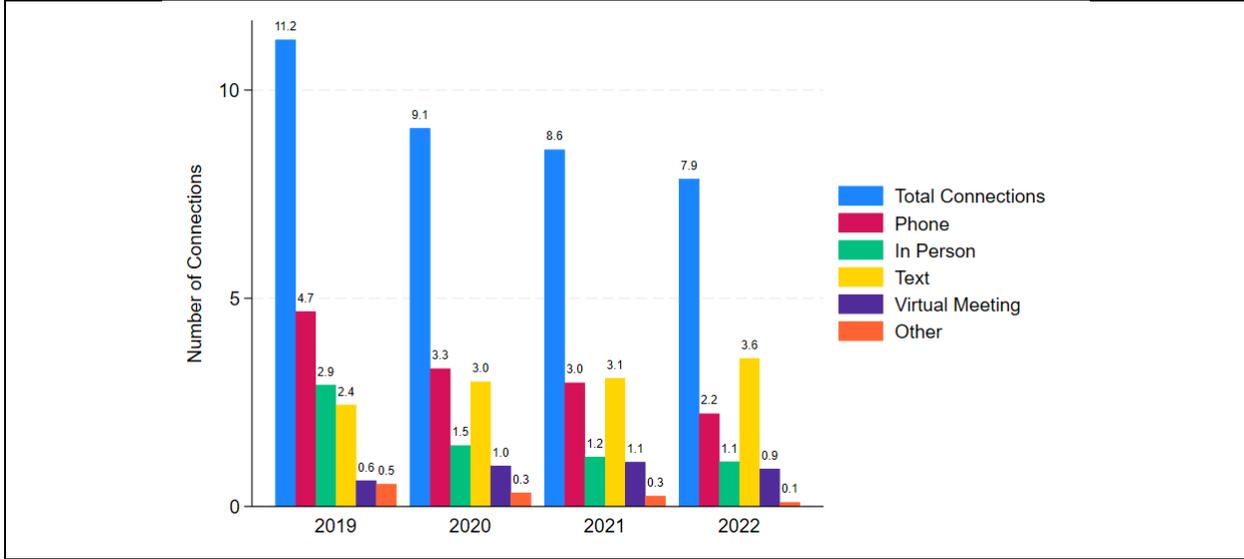
Focusing on Knox Promise students, **Figure 6** plots the average number of coaching connections in each school year, 2019-20 through 2022-23 (including all active cohorts in each year). Coaches reached students by phone more often than any other mode in 2019-20 and 2020-21, but texting was the most frequent mode of contact in 2021-22 and 2022-23. The figure also illustrates growth in virtual meetings as modes of contact over the first four years of the program, and the decline of in-person meetings. Note that email exchanges would be in the “Other” category and were very infrequent.

A recurring theme in our previous reports is that Knox Promise students who engaged more with their completion coaches tended to persist longer in college and complete credentials at a greater rate than other students. **Figures 7-9** show that this finding extends to the first four cohorts of Knox Promise students, 1-3 years after starting college. The figures report persistence and credential completion (**Figure 7**), credit completion rates (**Figure 8**), and term GPA (**Figure 9**) for students who connected with their coaches at least three times in their first semester (a below-average frequency) and students who connected 0-2 times in their first semester.

Students who connected more often with Knox Promise coaches completed more credits, earned better grades, and were more likely to earn a college credential.

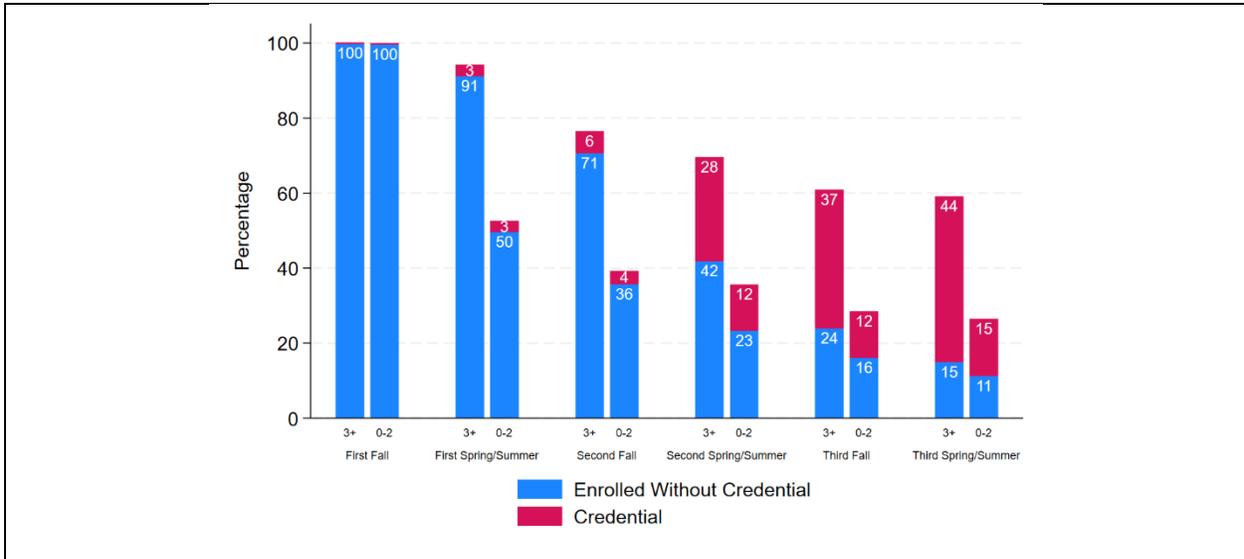


Figure 6. Knox Promise students had 8-11 coaching connections per year, on average, most often by phone or text.



Source: Author’s calculations, using tnAchieves program records merged to statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data. The sample is limited to Knox Promise students, entering classes of 2019 – 2022, who enrolled in in-state public two-year colleges. The figure plots connection frequency and mode by school year for all active cohorts.

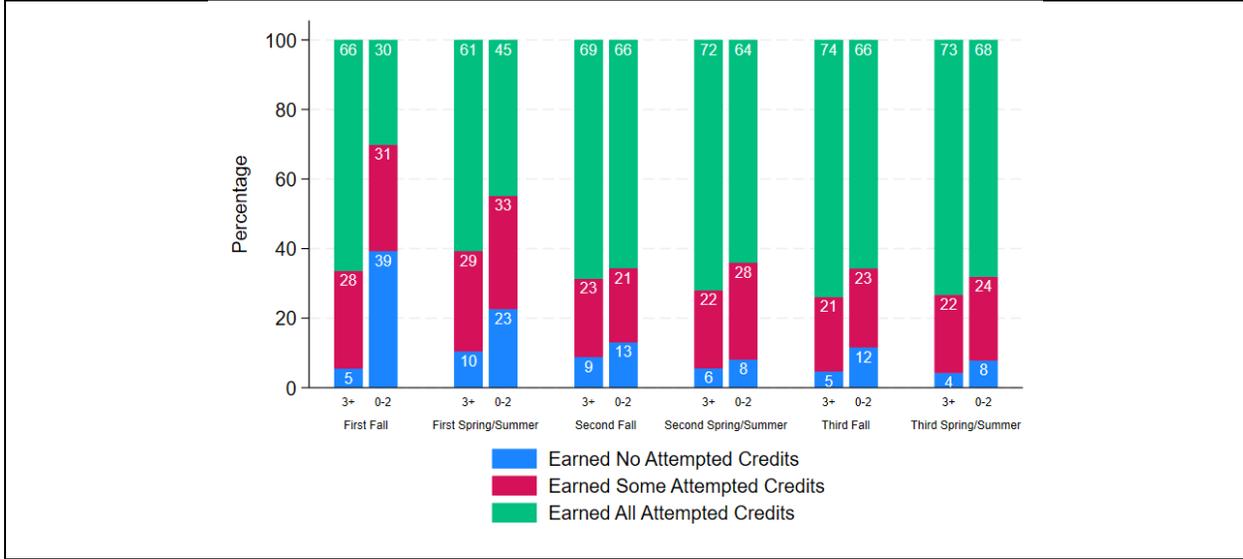
Figure 7. Knox Promise students who connected with their coaches three or more times in their first term connections were more than three times as likely to earn a certificate or degree than students with 0-2 first-term connections.



Source: Author’s calculations, using tnAchieves program records merged to statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data. The sample is limited to Knox Promise students, entering classes of 2019 – 2022, who enrolled in in-state public two-year colleges. Pairs of bars compare term-by-term outcomes for Knox Promise students who connected 3+ times with coaches in their first semester with outcomes for students with 0-2 first-semester connections. Credential recipients who re-enrolled are grouped with other credential recipients.

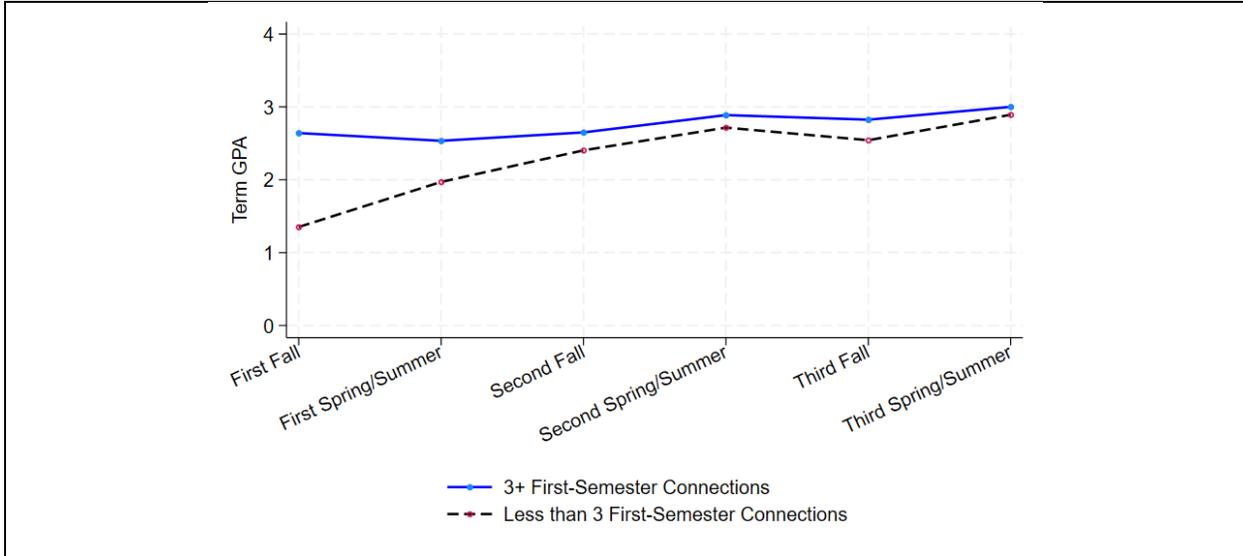


Figure 8. Knox Promise students who connected with their coaches three or more times in their first term were more likely to earn all attempted credits.



Source: Author’s calculations, using tnAchieves program records merged to statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data. The sample is limited to Knox Promise students, entering classes of 2019 – 2022, who enrolled in in-state public two-year colleges. Pairs of bars compare term-by-term outcomes for Knox Promise students who connected 3+ times with coaches in their first semester with outcomes for students with 0-2 first-semester connections.

Figure 9. Knox Promise students with more first-term coach connections had better grades, especially in their first year of college.



Source: Author’s calculations, using tnAchieves program records merged to statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data. The sample is limited to Knox Promise students, entering classes of 2019 – 2022, who enrolled in in-state public two-year colleges. Trend lines compare term GPA for Knox Promise students who connected 3+ times with coaches in their first semester with term GPA for students with 0-2 first-semester connections.



Students who were more engaged with coaching at the outset were 44% likely to have completed a college credential within three years, compared with just 15% for students with fewer first-term coach connections (Figure 7). Connecting 0-2 times in the first semester appears to be a significant signal that a student is disengaged or disengaging from college. Low-connection students were 39% likely to complete *none* of their attempted credits in the first semester, compared with 5% of students with three or more first-semester connections. Those who stayed enrolled in college improved their rate of credit completion, but not to the point of equivalence with students who were initially more engaged with coaching. Low-connection students also had much lower first-term GPAs than more engaged Knox Promise students (Figure 9).

Knox Promise Postsecondary Outcomes by First-Semester Completion Grant Receipt

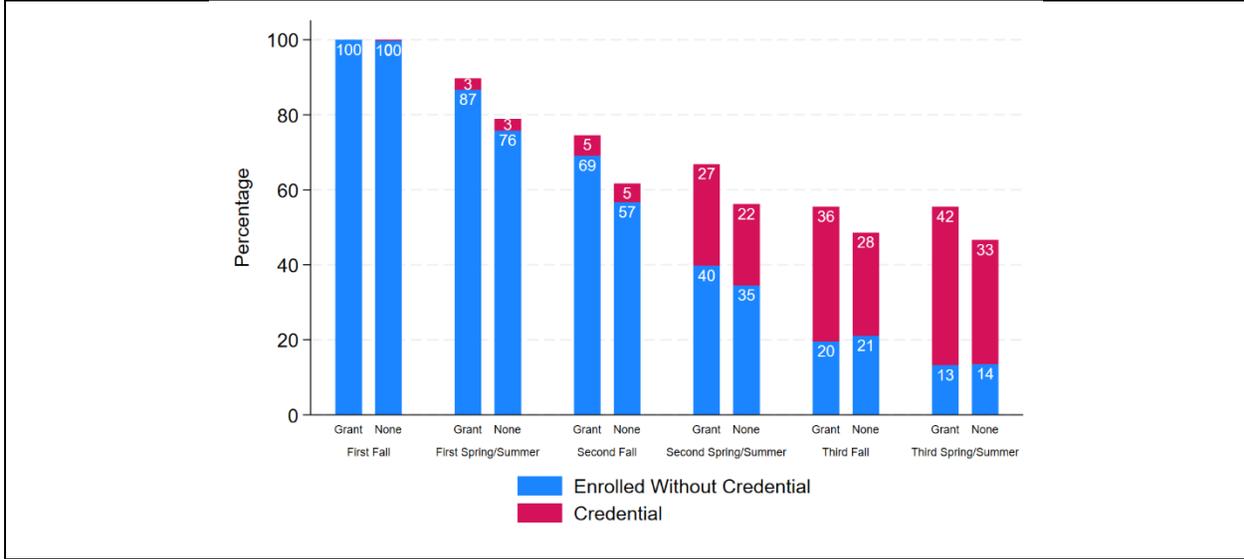
Previous reports in this series documented similar levels of postsecondary persistence between Knox Promise students who received or did not receive completion grants for food, transportation, or other non-tuition expenses. This was remarkable since grant recipients tended to be economically disadvantaged relative to other students. Although we are careful not to interpret descriptive findings as causal, these results, combined with quasi-experimental results from Carruthers and Pratt (2024a), are consistent with the idea that completion grants help mitigate economic disadvantage and improve student outcomes.

42% of students who received Knox Promise emergency grants in their first semester completed a postsecondary credential within three years, compared with 33% of other Knox Promise students.

Figures 10-12 extend earlier descriptive findings about grant recipients to cover the first four cohorts of Knox Promise students and postsecondary outcomes 1-3 years after starting college. Figure 10 shows that students who received completion grant aid in their first semester were more likely than other Knox Promise students to earn a college credential within three years (42% versus 33%) and about as likely to be enrolled and in pursuit of their first credential at that time (13% versus 14%).

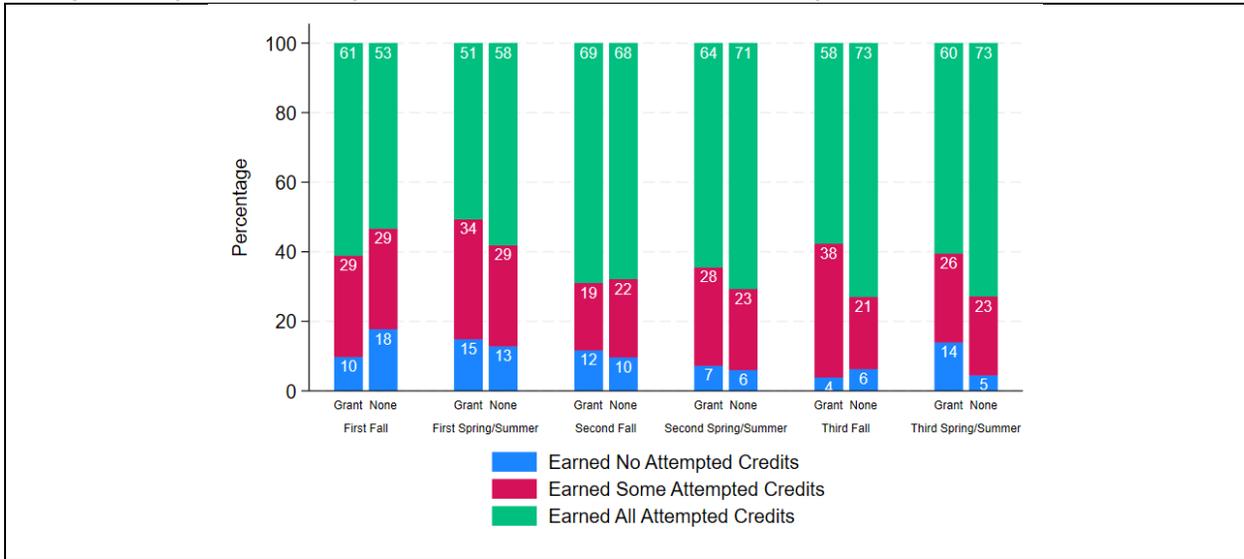
Figure 11 illustrates credit completion rates by first-term grant receipt. Grant recipients were about as likely as other Knox Promise students to complete all attempted credits over the first two years of college, but notably less likely to complete all attempted credits in their third year of college (58-60% versus 73%). Figure 12 depicts a similar pattern, where grant recipients earned similar or better grades as other students over the first 2.5 years of college but lower grades in their sixth semester. Recall that Knox Promise supports are only available for 2.5 years, or while students are enrolled in eligible certificate and associate programs. The third spring/summer term is outside of that window, and in addition, 16% of first-term grant recipients transferred to four-year schools by that time. The third-year disparity in credit completion and term GPA may be due in part to grant recipients losing access to supplemental aid, although not to the point that it harmed their advantage in credential receipt (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Knox Promise students who received completion grants in their first semester were more likely to earn a certificate or degree within three years.



Source: Author’s calculations, using tnAchieves program records merged to statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data. The sample is limited to Knox Promise students, entering classes of 2019 – 2022, who enrolled in in-state public two-year colleges. Pairs of bars compare term-by-term outcomes for Knox Promise students who received 1 or more completion grants in their first semester with outcomes for students who did not receive a completion grant. Credential recipients who re-enrolled are grouped with other credential recipients.

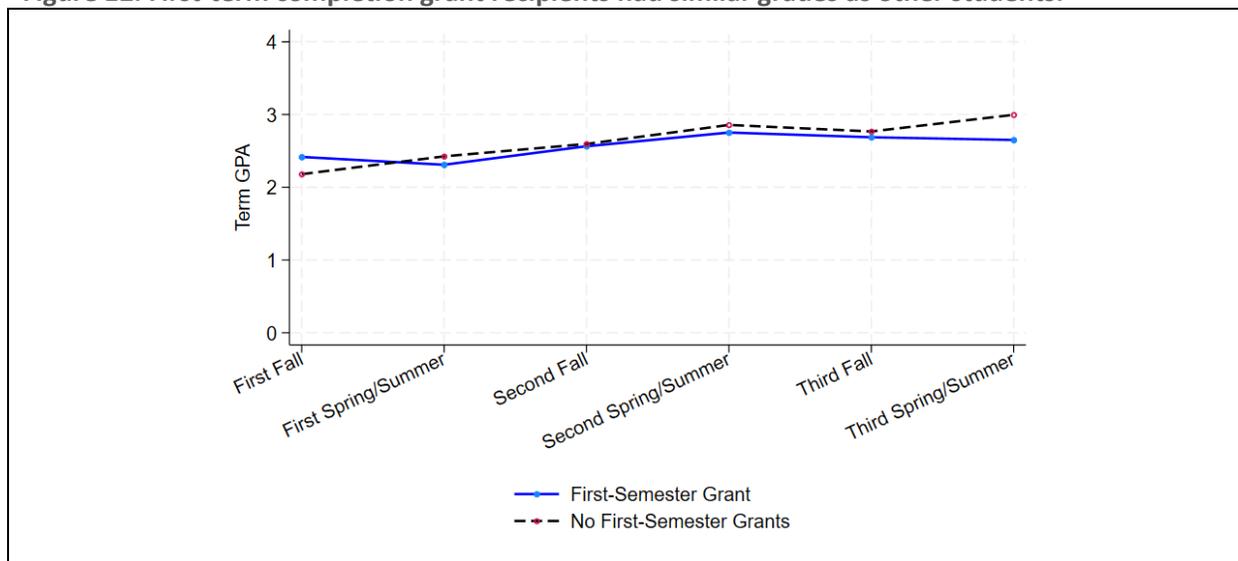
Figure 11. Knox Promise students who received completion grants in their first term were more likely to complete all attempted credits in that term, but less likely in later terms.



Source: Author’s calculations, using tnAchieves program records merged to statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data. The sample is limited to Knox Promise students, entering classes of 2019 – 2022, who enrolled in in-state public two-year colleges. Pairs of bars compare term-by-term outcomes for Knox Promise students who received 1 or more completion grants in their first semester with outcomes for students who did not receive a completion grant.



Figure 12. First-term completion grant recipients had similar grades as other students.



Source: Author’s calculations, using tnAchieves program records merged to statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data. The sample is limited to Knox Promise students, entering classes of 2019 – 2022, who enrolled in in-state public two-year colleges. Trend lines compare term GPA for Knox Promise students who received 1 or more completion grants in their first semester with term GPA for students who did not receive a completion grant.

Workforce Outcomes for Knox County College Completers, High School Classes of 2017 – 2020

For each individual in the postsecondary records, workforce data include quarterly earnings for each employer covered by Unemployment Insurance (UI), in addition to that employer’s NAICS industry code. The UI data offer a rich amount of information on a student’s workforce activity during and after college, but in two respects, it is an incomplete picture of the labor market outlook for Knox Promise students. First, earnings and employment data are limited to Tennessee employers and do not include earnings from self-employment or out-of-state employers. And second, not much time has passed since the first Knox Promise cohort started college in 2019. Early career earnings tend to be volatile, and it will be several years before the trajectory of Knox Promise student earnings becomes clear.

With these limitations in mind, **Figures 13-15** provide a very early look at in-state, UI-covered employment, earnings, and industry three years after starting college for Knox County two-year college students as well as other two-year college students throughout the state. So that results are not skewed by students who were still pursuing degrees at the three-year mark and working while enrolled, statistics for each figure are limited to students who earned a college credential (certificate, associate’s, or bachelor’s) and were not enrolled at the end of the third year after high school. In order to illustrate trends around the introduction of Knox Promise in 2019, each figure compares Knox County tnAchieves students with other first-time freshmen in two-year schools from the high school classes of 2017 – 2020. Note that all Knox County students in the 2019 and 2020 cohorts were Knox Promise students.



Figure 13 shows that over the two cohorts before Knox Promise and the first two cohorts of Knox Promise, Knox County’s two-year college completers were more likely to have UI-covered Tennessee earnings three years after starting college. For example, 80% of the 2018 Knox County cohort who went from high school graduation to a college credential within three years were working in Tennessee at the end of those three years, compared with 69% of 2018 students from other counties. This 11-point gap narrowed to 8 points for the 2019 cohort and widened to 12 points for the 2020 cohort.

4 out of 5 Knox Promise completers were working in Tennessee after college.

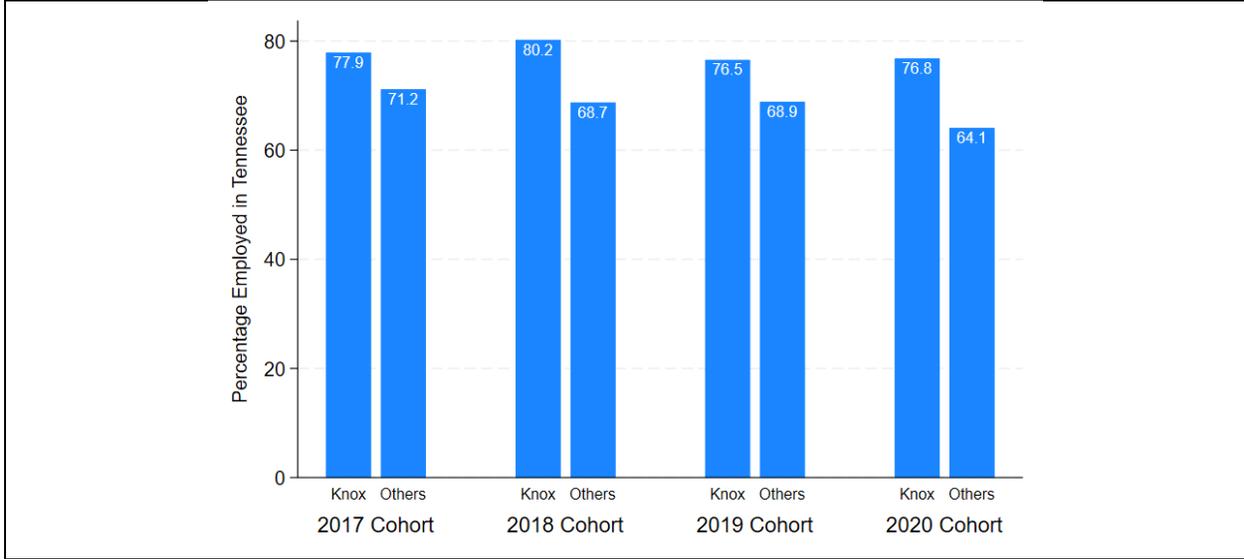
Figure 14 focuses on the individuals who were working in Figure 13 and plots their total earnings three years after college. Although Knox County students were more likely to work for UI-covered Tennessee employers than their peers, they tended to earn less. In the high school class of 2020, two-year college completers from Knox County earned \$23,500 three years after high school, compared with \$31,000 for students from outside of Knox County.

Part of this gap may be due to differences in how long Knox County students spent in school versus work within the three-year window. Looking back to Table 3, Knox Promise students were more likely than others to earn associate’s degrees, so third-year earnings would be fairly early in their careers. Greater labor force participation rates among Knox County students is another consideration. Under the extreme assumption that all students who were not observed in the Tennessee workforce had no earnings (as opposed to out-of-state earnings), Knox County students earned about \$1,700 less than others three years after starting college. This greatly narrows the \$7,500 gap in non-missing earnings due to Knox County students’ greater likelihood of in-state work. A third consideration is cost of living and entry-level pay differences between the places where Knox County versus other students ultimately find work. The pay and employment data do not include place of work or residence. More generally, labor market outcomes like those depicted in Figures 13-15 are descriptive differences that do not pinpoint the causal return to participating in Knox Promise and predecessor programs.

Figure 15 depicts a measure of job quality and potential midcareer pay for Knox County and other students. A student’s “industry score” is defined as the median earnings in their industry among 25-54 year-olds in the U.S. labor force. Nationwide earnings by industry are at the 2-digit NAICS level from the 2023 American Community Survey (Ruggles et al., 2025). Lower-paying industries include Retail Trade (earning \$28,000 – 32,000 annually, at the median) and Accommodation and Food Service (earning \$25,000). Higher earning industries include Finance and Insurance (\$50,000) and Manufacturing (\$38,000 – 48,000). Knox County’s two-year college graduates lagged behind other two-year college graduates by this measure, but to a lesser degree than for earnings. The 2020 Knox County cohort was working in industries with \$36,800 median pay, versus \$39,900 for 2020 students from other parts of Tennessee. This is an 8% gap in job/industry quality and potential midcareer pay, much narrower than the 32% gap in UI-covered wages.

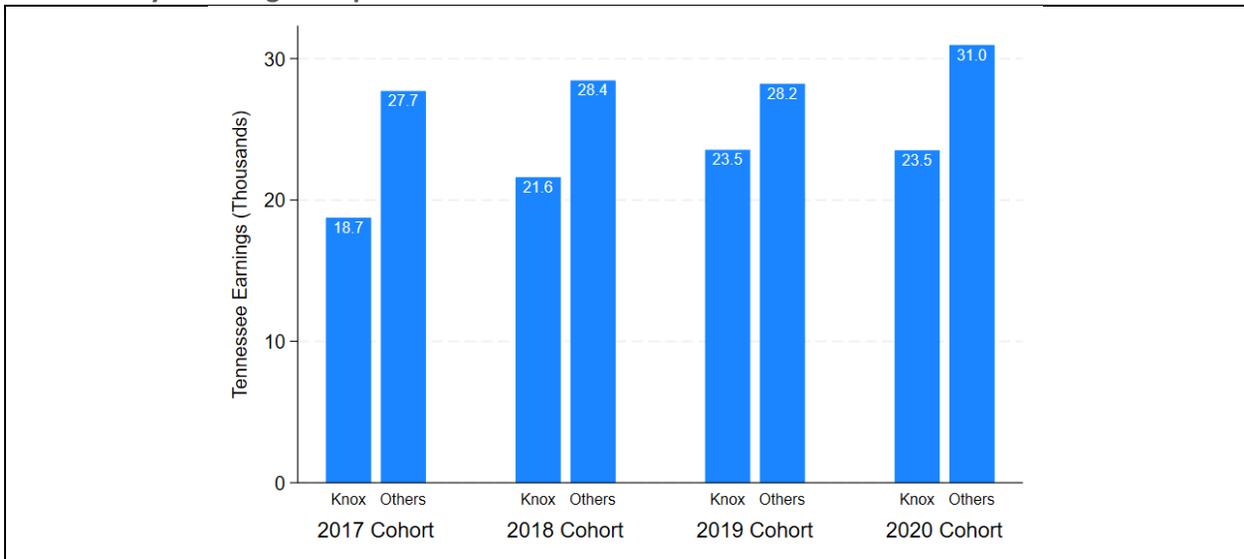


Figure 13. Three years after enrolling, Knox County’s two-year college completers were more likely to work in Tennessee than other two-year college completers.



Source: Author’s calculations, using tAchieves program records merged to statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data. The sample is limited to tAchieves students, entering classes of 2017 – 2020, who enrolled in in-state public two-year colleges, who completed a certificate or degree within three years, and who were not enrolled in the third spring/summer after high school. Pairs of bars compare in-state employment percentages after three years (third spring/summer) for Knox County tAchieves students versus other students in the same classes enrolling in two-year schools.

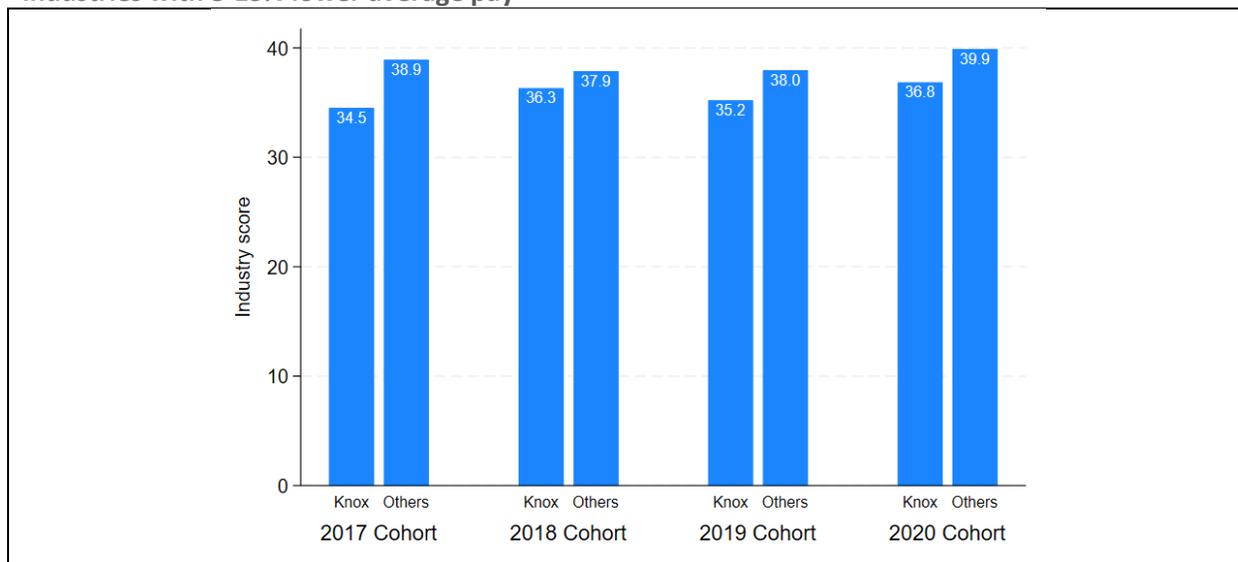
Figure 14. Three years after enrolling, Knox County’s two-year college completers earned less than other two-year college completers.



Source: Author’s calculations, using tAchieves program records merged to statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data. The sample is limited to tAchieves students, entering classes of 2017 – 2020, who enrolled in in-state public two-year colleges, who completed a certificate or degree within three years, and who were not enrolled in the third spring/summer after high school. Pairs of bars compare in-state earnings after three years (third spring/summer quarters, annualized and inflation-adjusted to 2022Q2 dollars) for Knox County tAchieves students versus other students in the same classes enrolling in two-year schools.



Figure 15. Three years after enrolling, Knox County’s two-year college completers worked in industries with 8-13% lower average pay



Source: Author’s calculations, using tnAchieves program records merged to statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data. The sample is limited to tnAchieves students, entering classes of 2017 – 2020, who enrolled in in-state public two-year colleges, who completed a certificate or degree within three years, and who were not enrolled in the third spring/summer after high school. Pairs of bars compare in-state industry score after three years (third spring/summer quarters) for Knox County tnAchieves students versus other students in the same classes enrolling in two-year schools. Industry score is equal to median income, in thousands, for age 25-54 U.S. workers in a student’s industry (2-digit NAICS code).

Postsecondary and Workforce Outcomes for tnAchieves Applicants

Results so far have focused on college-going students in the tnAchieves Knox Promise program, compared with students from the same graduating high school classes and other parts of the state, who likewise moved directly from high school into a two-year community or technical college. Program data also include a limited amount of information on tnAchieves and Tennessee Promise applicants from the statewide classes of 2017 – 2022. tnAchieves coordinates Tennessee Promise applications for the vast majority of 12th graders in the state, so applicant records likewise cover most of each graduating cohort, including many students who do not ultimately enroll in college. Matched workforce data include six years of post-high school employment and earnings for the 2017 and 2018 classes, and this more extended view illustrates an interesting pattern of catch-up between college-going students and others.

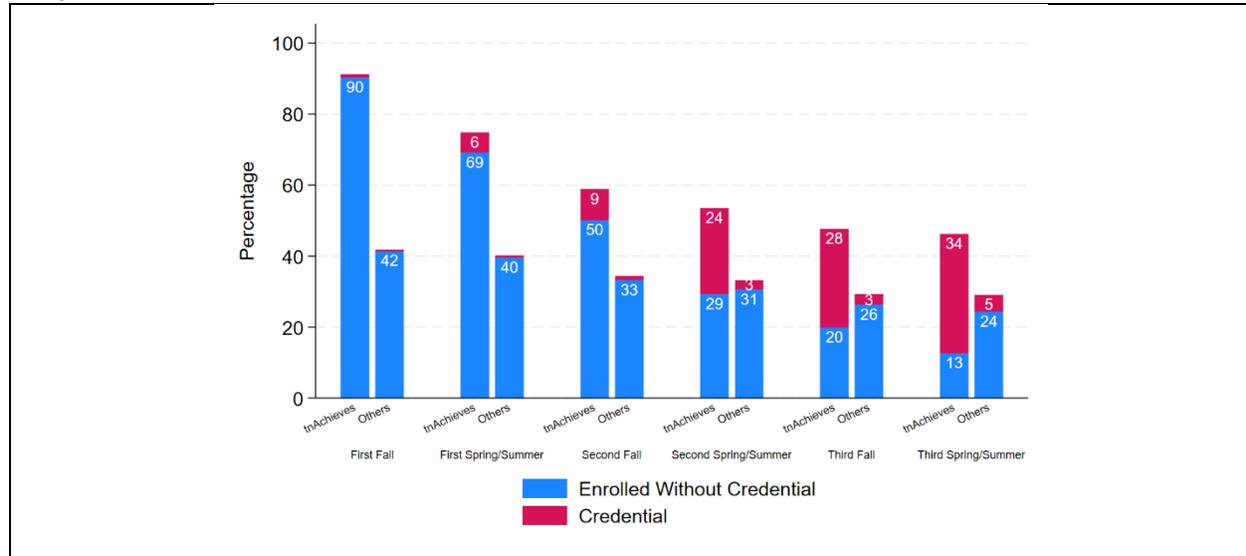
Figure 16 mimics the format of Figure 2, but rather than comparing Knox Promise students’ college persistence and completion with others who started in two-year schools, Figure 16 illustrates persistence and completion for tnAchieves students who met all 12th grade program requirements, versus other students who applied for Tennessee Promise in one of the counties covered by tnAchieves but who either voluntarily left the program or failed to complete FAFSA, mentoring, and community service requirements before enrolling in college. The figure shows that 90% of successful tnAchieves applicants enrolled in college for the fall term after high school. Note that the true figure is somewhat higher, but TN DATA enrollment records do not include all Promise-eligible private and four-year institutions. Similarly, the 42% enrollment rate for ineligible applicants is understated to some extent by out-of-state and private college enrollment. When surveyed, however, only 17% of ineligible applicants



stated that Tennessee Promise was their “backup plan” (Table 3), so a large part of the 48-percentage-point enrollment gap between tnAchieves students and ineligible applicants is likely from applicants not enrolling in any college.

Keeping Figure 16 enrollment patterns in mind, **Figure 17** traces average student earnings over the first six years after high school graduation. Trends are limited to the 2017 and 2018 cohorts of tnAchieves students and applicants. First and second quarter earnings are summed together and multiplied by two to get an annualized figure for spring/summer earnings, and third and fourth quarter earnings are summed together and multiplied by two for annualized fall earnings. All earnings figures are inflation-adjusted to be comparable with second-quarter 2022 dollars. The figure shows that ineligible tnAchieves applicants tended to have higher earnings than tnAchieves students for three years after high school, about the same level of earnings in the fourth year, and then lower earnings in the fifth and sixth years. This pattern is consistent with more tnAchieves students going to college initially and having less time for work while they are enrolled. After tnAchieves students started completing college, they quickly caught up with and surpassed the earnings of non-college-goers. **Figure 18** illustrates a similar pattern for job quality in terms of the industry score. tnAchieves students worked in lower-paying industries for the first three years after high school, but then worked in higher-paying industries in years 4-6. The gap widens for both observed and potential earnings.

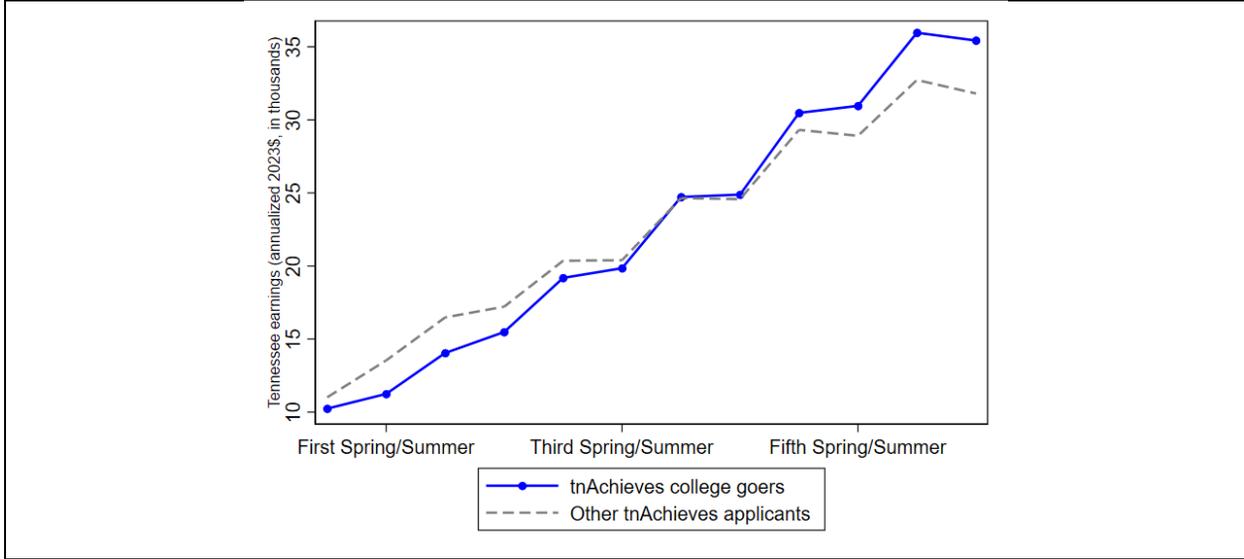
Figure 16. Statewide, tnAchieves students were more likely to remain in college and complete college credentials than tnAchieves applicants who did not meet all 12th grade eligibility requirements for Tennessee Promise.



Source: Author’s calculations, using tnAchieves program records merged to statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data. The sample is limited to tnAchieves students and applicants, classes of 2019 – 2022. Pairs of bars compare term-by-term outcomes for tnAchieves students who met all 12th grade program requirements (“tnAchieves”) with outcomes for applicants who did not (“Others”). Credential recipients who re-enrolled are grouped with other credential recipients.

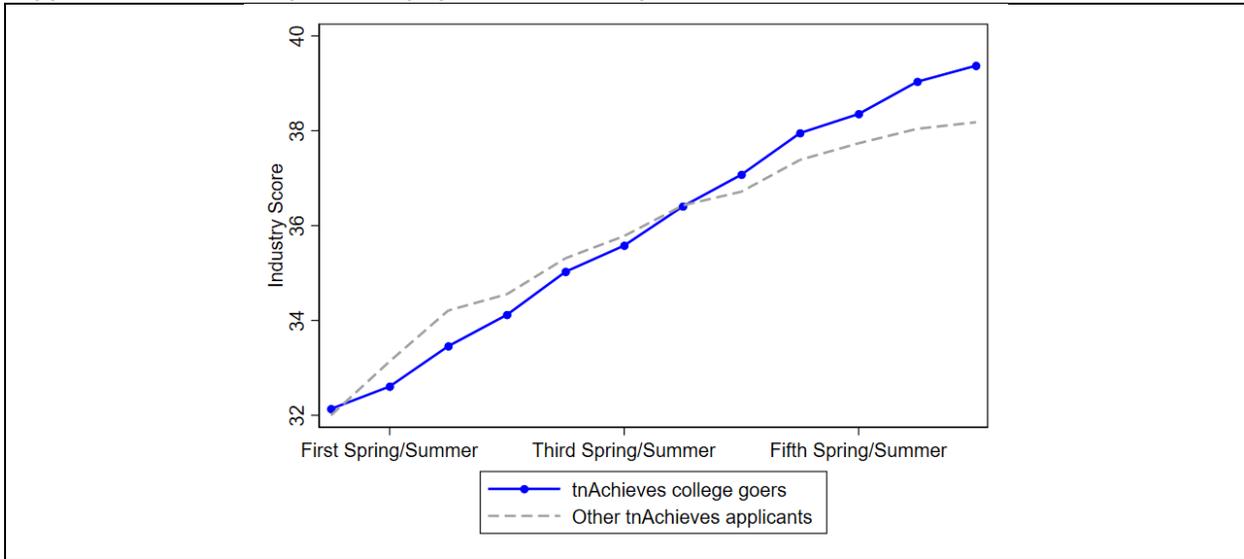


Figure 17. tnAchieves students earned less than ineligible applicants immediately after high school, on average, but they caught up and surpassed other applicants within five years.



Source: Author’s calculations, using tnAchieves program records merged to statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data. The sample is limited to tnAchieves students and applicants, classes of 2017 and 2018. Trend lines compare in-state earnings for tnAchieves students who met all 12th grade program requirements (“tnAchieves college goers”) with earnings for applicants who did not (“Other tnAchieves applicants”). In-state earnings for each six-month period are annualized and inflation-adjusted to 2022Q2 dollars.

Figure 18. Three years after high school, tnAchieves students caught up and surpassed other applicants in terms of potential pay in their industry.



Source: Author’s calculations, using tnAchieves program records merged to statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data. The sample is limited to tnAchieves students and applicants, classes of 2017 and 2018. Trend lines compare in-state industry score for tnAchieves students who met all 12th grade program requirements (“tnAchieves college goers”) with industry score for applicants who did not (“Other tnAchieves applicants”). Industry score is equal to median income, in thousands, for age 25-54 U.S. workers in a student’s industry (2-digit NAICS code).



Knox Promise students, who are more likely to *stay* in college than other two-year college-goers (Table 4), might similarly catch up with others after the three-year window shown in Figures 13-15.

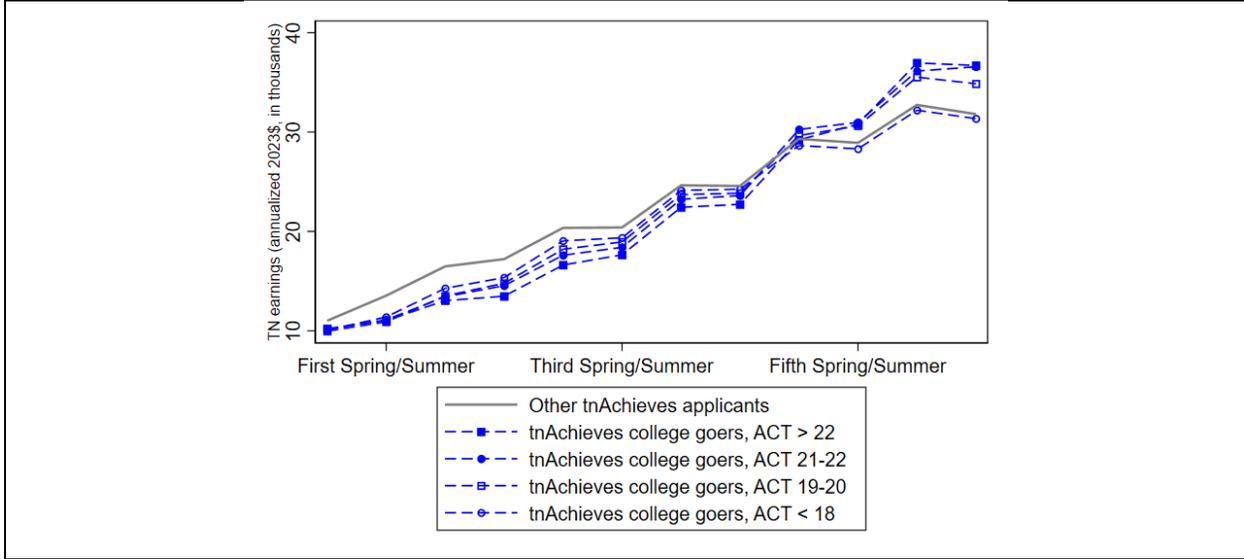
Figures 19-20 depict earnings and industry score for the same 2017 and 2018 cohorts of tnAchieves applicants and students, but by ACT score for tnAchieves students. The four series of trends represent roughly equal subgroups of tnAchieves students: Those scoring less than 18 on the ACT, those scoring 18-20, those scoring 21-22, and those scoring above 22. Note that scoring 21 points would qualify a student for the Tennessee HOPE scholarship and (for these cohorts), \$3,000 in annual merit aid toward two-year college expenses. Note also that ACT scores are missing for ineligible applicants unless they enroll in college (see discussion of Figures 21-22 below). Higher-scoring students had the lowest observed earnings and industry score for the first four years after high school, and lower-scoring students tended to catch up with ineligible applicants sooner. But six years after high school, high-ACT students had the highest UI-covered earnings and worked in better paying industries than low-ACT students.

Recall that Knox Promise students had somewhat higher ACT scores than other first-time freshmen (Table 1), which is another reason to expect the Figure 14-15 gap in earnings and industry score to narrow as more time passes.

Finally, **Figures 21-22** plot average observed and potential earnings five years after high school for the classes of 2017 and 2018, again limited to tnAchieves students and ineligible applicants, but additionally focusing on the college-going subset of those students. College enrollees had more comprehensive ACT records, allowing for a comparison of earnings at intersections of tnAchieves status and ACT score. tnAchieves students had slightly higher fifth-year earnings if they had ACT scores under 21, and slightly lower earnings if they had ACT scores over 21. tnAchieves students had a higher fifth-year industry score regardless of ACT, on average, although the difference was very small. The earnings advantage of tnAchieves students at lower ACT levels is interesting, even though it is very small. Students with ACT scores under 21 were less likely to be eligible for the HOPE scholarship, and so may have benefited more from last-dollar tuition support through Tennessee Promise and tnAchieves.

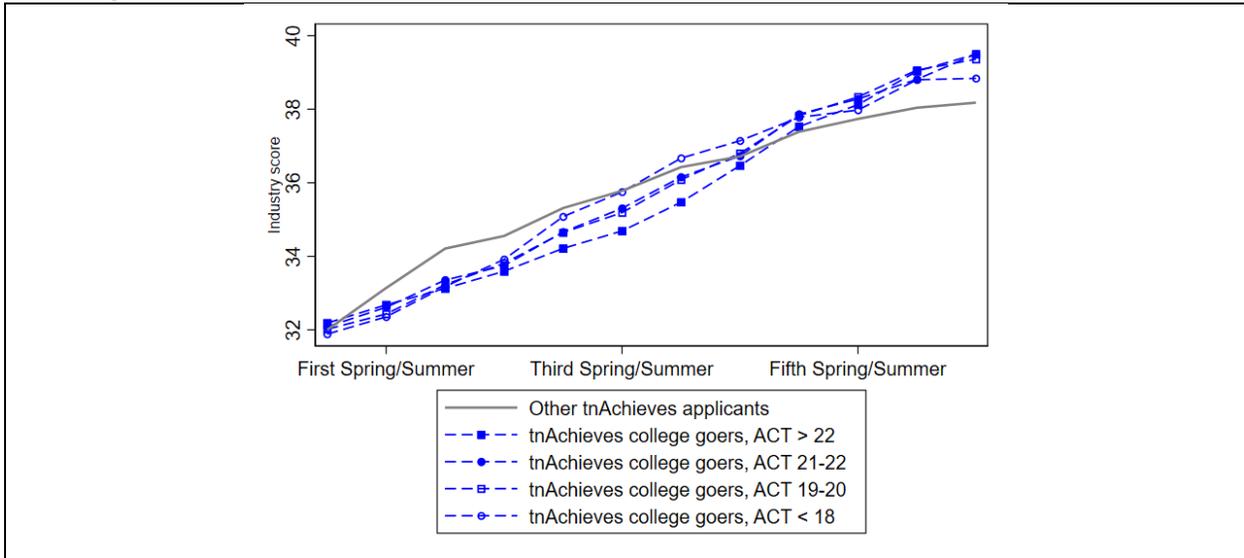


Figure 19. tnAchieves students with higher ACT scores had the lowest earnings for the first three years after high school, but they had the highest earnings 5-6 years after high school.



Source: Author’s calculations, using tnAchieves program records merged to statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data. The sample is limited to tnAchieves students and applicants, classes of 2017 and 2018. Trend lines compare in-state earnings for tnAchieves students who met all 12th grade program requirements (“tnAchieves college goers”), by ACT, with earnings for applicants who did not (“Other tnAchieves applicants”). In-state earnings for each six-month period are annualized and inflation-adjusted to 2023Q2 dollars.

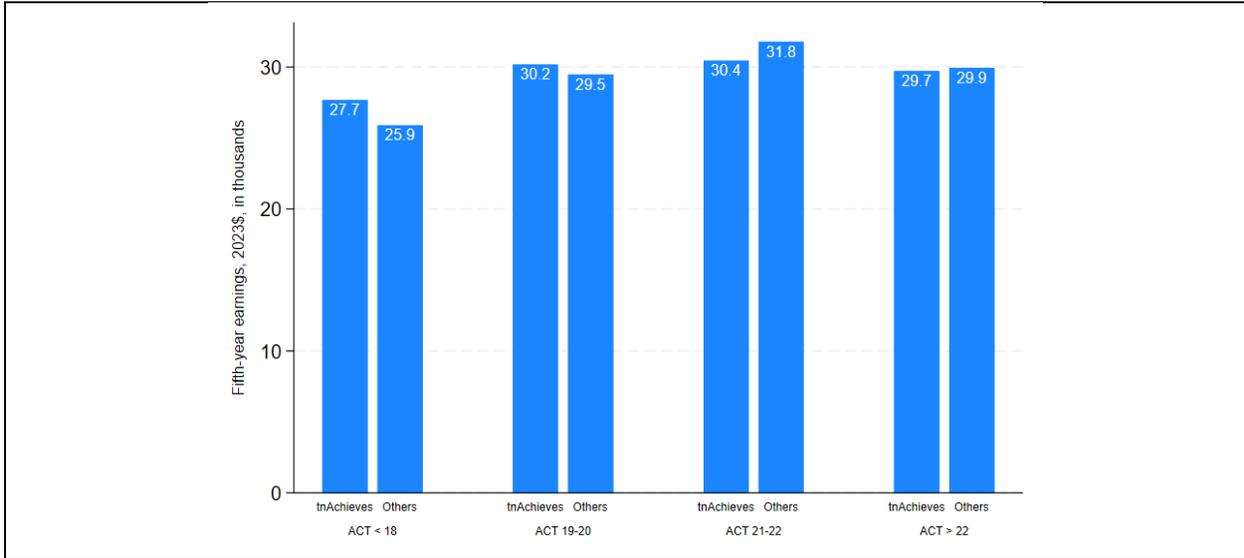
Figure 20. tnAchieves students with higher ACT scores worked in lower-paying industries three years after high school, but they moved into higher paying industries than other students 5-6 years after high school.



Source: Author’s calculations, using tnAchieves program records merged to statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data. The sample is limited to tnAchieves students and applicants, classes of 2017 and 2018. Trend lines compare in-state industry score for tnAchieves students who met all 12th grade program requirements (“tnAchieves college goers”), by ACT, with industry score for applicants who did not (“Other tnAchieves applicants”). Industry score is equal to median income, in thousands, for age 25-54 U.S. workers in a student’s industry (2-digit NAICS code).

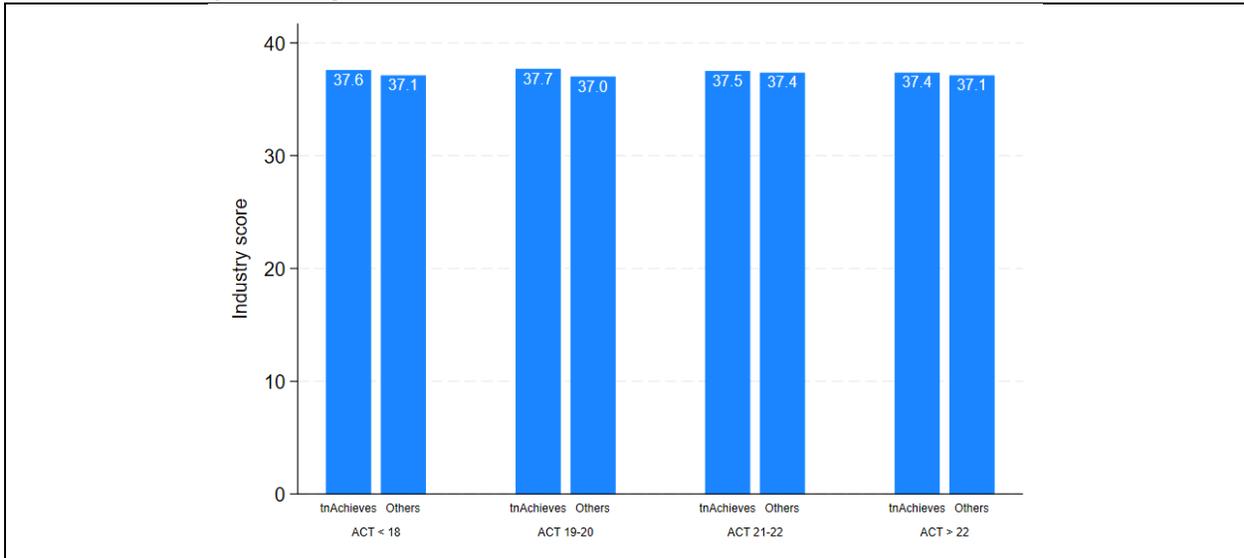


Figure 21. Five years after enrolling, tnAchieves students with lower, HOPE-ineligible ACT scores earned 2-7% more than other two-year students with lower ACT scores. tnAchieves students with HOPE-eligible ACT earned the same or less than other high-ACT two-year students.



Source: Author’s calculations, using tnAchieves program records merged to statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data. The sample is limited to tnAchieves students and applicants who enrolled in two-year colleges, classes of 2017 and 2018. Bars compare in-state, fifth-year earnings for tnAchieves students who met all 12th grade program requirements (“tnAchieves”), by ACT, with earnings for applicants who did not (“Others”). In-state earnings for each six-month period are annualized and inflation-adjusted to 2022Q2 dollars.

Figure 22. Five years after enrolling, tnAchieves students worked in slightly higher paying industries than other two-year college students.



Source: Author’s calculations, using tnAchieves program records merged to statewide TN DATA student longitudinal data. The sample is limited to tnAchieves students and applicants who enrolled in two-year colleges, classes of 2017 and 2018. Bars compare in-state, fifth-year industry score for tnAchieves students who met all 12th grade program requirements (“tnAchieves”), by ACT, with industry score for applicants who did not (“Others”). Industry score is equal to median income, in thousands, for age 25-54 U.S. workers in a student’s industry (2-digit NAICS code).



Section 4: Conclusion

Tennessee Promise, tnAchieves, and Knox Promise work together to support students pursuing credentials in the state's two-year schools, as well as those who are pursuing higher degrees and transfer pathways between two-year and four-year schools. Tennessee Promise guarantees tuition and fee coverage, while tnAchieves coordinates Promise eligibility, renewal, mentoring, and supplementary supports. For 2019 – 2022 Knox County students, those additional supports included access to completion coaches and completion grants.

In a series of reports, Boyd Center researchers have shown that students who were more engaged with Knox Promise coaching tended to have better postsecondary outcomes, in terms of re-enrollment and credential completion. Studies by other research teams have come to similar conclusions about the association between student outcomes and tnAchieves coaching (Dickason et al., 2024; Kim and Gegenheimer, 2023). Previous Boyd Center reports also showed that completion grant recipients did about as well, or better, in college as other Knox Promise students, despite large economic disadvantages. This is also in agreement with what students say about the importance of grant aid in supporting their progress through college (Dickason et al., 2024). When coaching and completion grants expanded beyond Knox County to cover low-income students statewide, newly eligible students had higher rates of fall-to-fall persistence (Carruthers and Pratt, 2024a). Experimentation within tnAchieves has been informative as well. Kim and Gegenheimer (2023) find little difference in student outcomes with proactive as opposed to reactive coaching. This insight, combined with results from Carruthers and Pratt (2024), suggests that having access to coaching at all is more effective than variations on the coaching model.

This final Boyd Center report extends previous descriptive analysis of Knox Promise students, covering the first four cohorts and 1-3 years of postsecondary outcomes. As in earlier reports, it is evident that Knox Promise students stay in college longer than other first-time freshmen in two-year schools, and that they attain more college credentials. First-semester engagement with coaching continues to be a strong signal of later success in college, and first-semester grant recipients continue to do about as well as other Knox Promise students, at least during the 2.5 years in which they can receive program benefits.

This final report also includes, for the first time, Knox Promise student employment outcomes three years after starting college, and at least one term after completing college. Knox Promise alumni are more likely to work in Tennessee after three years, but if they are working, they tend to have lower earnings and jobs in lower-paying industries compared with their peers from elsewhere in Tennessee. The three-year time horizon might be too short to assess the labor market return on investment in Knox Promise. Earnings for college-going students take about 4 years to catch up with earnings for students who did not go to college, and even a little longer for high-achieving students. Knox Promise students had higher ACTs than other first-time freshmen in Tennessee, they were more likely to aspire to earn a bachelor's degree, and they tended to stay in college for longer than other students. Each of these factors could push full-time labor market entry back beyond the three-year window that is currently available to study.

More generally, future analyses of the return on investment in Knox Promise and similar programs should account for non-randomness in where students go to high school (Knox County or elsewhere)



and how much they choose to engage with coaching and completion grant opportunities. Carruthers and Pratt's (2024a) quasi-experimental framework and the 2022 COMPLETE expansion from Knox County to low-income students statewide offer an opportunity to more rigorously quantify the causal effects of the Knox Promise model on postsecondary and workforce success. Based on the experience of the 2017 and 2018 tnAchieves cohorts, a 5-6 year time horizon may be enough to allow researchers to observe effects of COMPLETE on postsecondary attainment as well as initial entry and earnings growth in the labor market.

Acknowledgements

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