COLLEGE PROMISE PROJECT

Sustainable, Robust, and Inclusive College Promise Programs in California's Community Colleges: Examining the Relationship Between Funding Models and Equity

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary educational landscape, the significance of postsecondary education has increased, with evidence indicating that obtaining a college degree is associated with enhanced income levels and improved prospects for social mobility (Chetty et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2019; Scott-Clayton & Wen, 2019). Despite these benefits, access to and completion of higher education remains challenging, particularly for students from historically marginalized groups (Ballerini & Feldblum, 2021; Carnevale & Cheah, 2018). College Promise programs have been instituted to mitigate these challenges by offering financial support to foster greater access to and affordability of college education (Dowd et al., 2020; Miller-Adams, 2015; Perna & Leigh, 2018).

For College Promise programs to be effective and impactful, they must secure and maintain sufficient funding, with a particular emphasis on providing comprehensive financial aid and student services in an equitable manner. The sustainability of program funding is crucial for instilling confidence among students and their families that program benefits will be available to them and for reinforcing a culture that values higher education within schools and communities (Burkander et al., 2019).

This research aims to describe the funding mechanisms of College Promise programs in California, propose a preliminary framework for understanding the funding models of these programs, and examine the relationship between funding models, program expenditures, and equity. Findings from this study are intended to equip policymakers and leaders of College Promise programs with insights that could facilitate the development or enhancement of equitable and financially sustainable programs.

INTRODUCTION

Seventy percent of all jobs require at least some postsecondary education or training beyond a high school degree, yet students face significant barriers to accessing and completing higher education (Carnevale & Cheah, 2018). In recent years, an increasing number of college students have family and work responsibilities, face food and housing insecurity, and experience social and emotional stressors, which were exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic (Baker-Smith et al., 2020). These barriers are greatest for students with low income; first-generation students; students of color; and other marginalized students, such as LGBTQ+ students, undocumented/DACA students (Ballerini et al., 2020; Ballerini & Feldblum, 2021), students formerly in foster care, students with a disability, and students impacted by the justice system, among others.

College Promise programs are considered one way to improve college access and affordability by reducing financial barriers (Dowd et al., 2020; Perna & Leigh, 2018). Although there is no single definition of College Promise, most scholars and practitioners agree that College Promise programs provide financial support to eligible students who live or attend school in a particular place (Miller-Adams, 2015; Perna & Leigh, 2018). In recent years, programs are becoming more robust and equitable by expanding their eligibility beyond recent high school graduates who enroll full-time in college, emphasizing early messaging and providing support services, often through partnerships from within and beyond institutions of higher education (Iriti et al., 2018; Miller-Adams, 2015; Rauner, 2018; Rauner et al., 2019).

All College Promise programs, especially those with robust and equitable financial support and student services, are challenged with securing adequate funding. Yet only if program funding is sustainable will students and their families gain confidence that program benefits will be available to them and will the college-going culture in schools and communities be strengthened (Burkander et al., 2019; Rauner & Lundquist, 2020). This study will help address the challenge of funding sustainability by providing the field with an emerging framework for understanding California College Promise funding models that can be strengthened and expanded upon in broader contexts.

Results from this analysis can provide local, state, and federal College Promise program policymakers, leaders, and funders with a greater understanding of California's funding models. Although California is uniquely situated in the College Promise landscape given the relatively low community college tuition and dedicated state funding to support College Promise, the findings from this study can be used more broadly to make informed decisions about developing and strengthening College Promise funding structures and distributing College Promise resources to support equitable outcomes.

This report is structured into five sections. First, it describes the historical context of higher education costs within California alongside the development of the state's College Promise initiatives and legislative measures. The next two sections provide descriptions of the research questions that guided our study and the methodological framework employed for the analysis. The study findings are presented in the fourth section, which includes the identification of four funding models derived from an examination of program funding streams; the relationship between the funding models and the way that programs allocated their funding; and the relationship between funding models and three dimensions of equity: sustainability, robustness, and inclusiveness. We close out the report by providing recommendations to deepen our understanding of College Promise program funding models and their relationship to equitable programming.

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA

California has a long-standing commitment to affordability in higher education, especially in its community college system, which, with 116 colleges that serve 1.64 million students, is the largest higher education system in the United States (California Community College Chancellor's Office [CCCCO], n.d.-b). Free tuition was codified in the 1960 California Master Plan, but modest fees were introduced to 4-year colleges in 1975 due to education budget cuts. In 1985, when community colleges began to charge tuition, the community college Board of Governors (BOG) implemented a tuition-waiver program (BOG Fee Waiver) for dependent students from families with low income or independent students with low income (hereafter referred to as students with low income). In the late 1990s, tuition across California's three higher education systems (University of California, California State University, and California Community College) more than tripled and increased again due to the 2009 budget deficit. In 2023, full-time tuition for in-state California community college students was $46 per unit, or $1,104 per year for 12 units per semester. Although tuition is the highest in California's history, the cost of attending community colleges in California is among the most affordable in the country.

College Promise in California

With the initiation of the BOG Fee Waiver program, community college tuition has remained free to Californians with low income (Rauner & Lundquist, 2019). In 2017, as the College Promise movement was gaining national recognition and the state was eager to gain visibility for existing legislation, the BOG Fee Waiver was renamed the California College Promise Grant (CCPG). Later that year, State Assembly Bill 19 (AB 19, 2017) made funding available to community colleges to either launch or expand their community college–based College Promise programs. Two years later, in 2019, AB 19 was amended through Assembly Bill 2 (AB 2, 2019) to provide funding for students for a 2nd year. The legislation included an equity focus, with the intention to "reduce achievement gaps," but was designed to fund tuition to a less vulnerable population: students with incomes higher than the cutoff for CCPG eligibility. By combining this funding with CCPG tuition waivers, California was able to announce that tuition was free for all community college students. A unique feature of AB 19 and AB 2 legislation was the high level of flexibility in how the funding could be used. Colleges could allocate funds to any activity that met the stated goals of the legislation to

increase college enrollment and completion and to reduce student achievement gaps.[2] However, if colleges chose to allocate the funding to tuition, they could only pay for tuition for first-time, full-time students who were not eligible for CCPG. In 2021/22, 41 percent of students in the community college system received AB 19/AB 2 funding for tuition or other grants.

After AB 19, the number of California's College Promise programs grew rapidly. The first formal College Promise program that waived tuition for all students launched in 2006,[3] and there was slow and steady growth for the following decade. By 2016, there were 23 programs, and that number almost doubled within 2 years. The College Promise Project (CPP) at WestEd identified 118 programs. The large number of California's College Promise programs and the variation in their funding models provided us with an ideal environment for developing an emerging framework that can eventually be strengthened and expanded upon in broader College Promise contexts.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

In this study, the CPP research team investigated the funding sources of robust California College Promise programs to create a framework for understanding the program's funding models using data from the 2021/22 academic year. Next, we explored the relationship between these funding models and program expenditures. Then we examined the relationship between the funding models and program features that can lead to more equitable access, persistence, and completion for marginalized students: sustainability, robustness, and inclusiveness.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this investigation:

1. What are the funding models for California College Promise programs?

2. What is the relationship between program funding models and program expenditures?

3. What is the relationship between funding models and equity as measured by financial sustainability, robustness, and inclusiveness?

To frame our third research question, we further describe our rationale on how sustainability, robustness, and inclusiveness relate to understanding equitable funding models.

Sustainability

Financially sustainable College Promise programs can help create and strengthen a college-going culture (Jones et al., 2012). When program eligibility requirements and benefits are consistent over time, students and their families can trust that they will benefit from the program (Rauner & Lundquist, 2020). Evidence suggests that College Promise programs can positively impact high school student outcomes, including increases in college expectations, academic performance, and graduation rates (Bartik & Lachowska, 2014; Carruthers & Fox, 2016; Gonzalez et al., 2014; Harris & Mills, 2021). On the other hand, confidence in College Promise programs can erode when inconsistent funding leads to changes in eligibility requirements or benefits. This was the case in Oregon in 2020 when legislative budget cuts required the Oregon Promise to tighten need-based requirements and rescind existing awards.

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[2] For more detailed information on California's College Promise history, landscape, and legislation, please see the briefs and reports in WestEd's College Promise Project website: https://californiacollegepromise.wested.org/

[3] Prior to the first College Promise program, tuition was free for students with low income through CCPG. College Promise programs provided tuition for all students, including those who were not eligible for CCPG.

Sustainability is especially important in the pursuit of equity because students may have differential access to information and supports to keep abreast of program changes and to fully understand program benefits.

Robustness

Tuition accounts for around 20 percent of the total cost of attending community college (Ma & Pender, 2023), and the percentage is even smaller in California, where tuition costs are among the lowest in the country. Most college costs are not from tuition but are associated with housing, books, meals, transportation, and other living expenses. A 2016 study found that Pell-eligible students who were provided with financial support beyond tuition and fees were more likely to enroll full-time; work fewer total hours; and work fewer extended hours, such as early in the morning or overnight (Broton et al., 2016). However, other studies suggested a weak relationship between additional financial support and workforce behavior (Richburg-Hayes et al., 2009; Sommo et al., 2014).

Financial support, although essential, is insufficient for equitable access and completion (Perna & Kurban, 2013; Scott-Clayton, 2011). Historically marginalized students are less likely to have the information and support to gain access to college and to get the support that they need to succeed (De La Rosa, 2006; Harris et al., 2018; Perna, 2016; Perna et al., 2020). This support requires investments in personnel to recruit and support matriculation, increase program efficiency, improve access to counseling, provide just-in-time reminders about deadlines and support opportunities, and create early alert systems (Perna et al., 2020; Rauner et al., 2019).

Combining financial and nonfinancial support has been shown to improve student outcomes. One example is the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) degree program of the City University of New York (CUNY) that combines financial support with early enrollment, blocked courses with cohorts, frequent meetings with advisors and career services staff, and participation in student success seminars. Evaluations of CUNY ASAP and several replication sites found that this comprehensive support structure had positive effects on enrollment, persistence, credit accumulation, and associate degree completion, with mixed results in one replication site (Miller & Weiss, 2021; Ratledge et al., 2021; Weiss et al., 2019).

Inclusiveness

Equitable programs should be both sustainable and robust, but historically marginalized students must have access to these programs for them to be truly equitable. Program access is determined by eligibility requirements such as full-time enrollment. Students who are more vulnerable such as students with the greatest financial need, students of color, students who are undocumented and students who are currently or formerly part of the foster care system are more likely to enroll on a part-time basis. When program eligibility requirements directly or indirectly limit access for these groups, existing education disparities may be further exacerbated.

METHODOLOGY

In this section, we describe the inclusiveness criteria for College Promise programs in this analysis and the processes and measures used for data collection and analysis.

Defining and Categorizing College Promise Programs in California

The CPP has been gathering data on College Promise programs in California since 2016.[4] We defined College Promise programs as those that provide financial support to students to attend college, have universal eligibility criteria rather than subjective admissions processes, and were designed with the intention of being maintained over time.

In previous analyses, programs that fit within this definition were placed into one of four categories. The first three categories made distinctions among the programs that are based in community colleges—the vast majority of California's programs. The fourth category included the city- or nonprofit-based programs.

Category I programs combined the state's College Promise–specific funding streams with other funding, tuition waivers and sometimes nontuition fees–created branding and marketing that was specific to their college and provided additional financial support to students (Table 1). All Category I programs also provide students with academic and/or personal support. The factors that made these programs more robust than the others were that they had funding beyond the two state College Promise funding streams and that participants received financial support beyond tuition and sometimes fees.

TABLE 1.

Categories of California's Community College–Based College Promise Programs, by Program Feature

Program feature	Category I	Category II	Category III
Leverage California's College Promise funding streams: CCPG & AB 19/AB 2	X	X	X
Tuition waivers and sometimes nontuition fees	X	X	X
College-specific program branding and marketing	X	X	-
Funding streams outside of California College Promise (e.g., foundation grants)	X	-	-
Financial support beyond tuition and sometimes fees	X	-	-
Academic and/or personal support	All	Some	Some

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[4] In 2016, the CPP collected program-level data and developed a California College Promise Project database. Data were gathered from websites and validated through phone and email correspondence. A second formal data collection effort was completed in 2018 to confirm existing information through program surveys, internet searches, and direct communication with program administrators. In addition to these formal data-gathering efforts, the database has been regularly updated based on information gathered through program contacts, targeted website searches, and Google Alerts as new programs were launched and existing programs underwent changes.

Like Category I programs, programs in Category II provide students with tuition and sometimes nontuition fee waivers using state-level College Promise funding streams, and they brand and market their own programs. These programs differ from those in Category I because they do not provide financial support to students beyond tuition and sometimes fees.

Category III programs are those that simply administer state-level College Promise funding[5] to students through financial aid offices. There is no cohesive program at the colleges; fee waivers are simply identified in students' bills. These are the least robust of the programs in the California Community College system.

Study Sample

The analytic sample for this study includes Category I programs, the most robust programs whose budgets included funding beyond the state College Promise streams. Programs from Categories II and III were not included because they do not include funding streams other than California's College Promise funding and do not provide students with financial support outside of the tuition and fees covered by these funding streams.

In prior reports and versions of the California College Promise database, there were originally 93 Category I programs. To update this information at the beginning of the study in August 2021, we verified information about the Category I programs by reviewing publicly available information, communicating with program staff via email or Zoom, and collecting program documentation (e.g., reports, communication documents, program evaluations). Through that process, the team determined that 40 programs remained in Category I and were eligible to be included in the study. The other 53 programs were excluded due to one or more of the following reasons based on the updated information gathered during this process: They did not provide students with support beyond tuition and sometimes fees, they were not based in a community college, or they canceled the program.[6]

Data Collection

There were two main forms of data collection for this study: interviews and the submission of a structured template to fill out financial information on each program. Of the 40 programs, one opted out of participating in the study, and we were unable to identify a program contact who could provide us with the necessary program information and data for another. The team conducted structured interviews with the remaining 38 programs to verify program history, design, and funding mechanisms. Participants were also asked to complete a standardized template gathering program data on student enrollment, program funding, and program expenditures for the 2021/22 academic year. The team engaged in follow-up discussions and email communication with program leaders to clarify data and confirm accuracy.

Colleges from two multiple-college districts were considered separate programs in previous studies. In this study, we counted each district as a single program because the colleges within each of these two districts had identical funding streams, staffing, and program features. This decreased the number of programs in the sample from 38 to 28. Data were incomplete for 15 of these programs,[7] resulting in 13 programs in the analytic sample, all of whom requested to remain anonymous.

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[5] The two state-level College Promise funding streams are the CCPG and AB 19/AB 2 funding.

[6] Two programs were not responsive, so we could not verify eligibility in the analytic sample. However, information in our database and publicly available data indicated that they would not be eligible to be included in the study based on the reasons listed above.

[7] Reasons for incomplete data included insufficient staff capacity to gather or calculate data and refusal to share data, such as staffing time allocation and salary information.

Variable Measures and Definitions

The team used two categories of program data in these analyses: revenue sources and expenditures. Data on program revenue sources were used to develop the California College Promise funding models. Expenditure data were used to understand the relationship between funding models and the ways that programs allocate their budgets. Measures of equity incorporate both revenue sources and expenditure data.

Revenue Sources

The primary revenue sources that emerged from the data were two funding categories: College Promise funding and supplemental funding.

College Promise Funding

College Promise funding data include the state's two College Promise funding streams: the CCPG and College Promise funding that is allocated to districts and colleges through California's AB 19 and AB 2 legislation (Figure 1).

Figure 1.
California College Promise Funding Categories and Subcategories
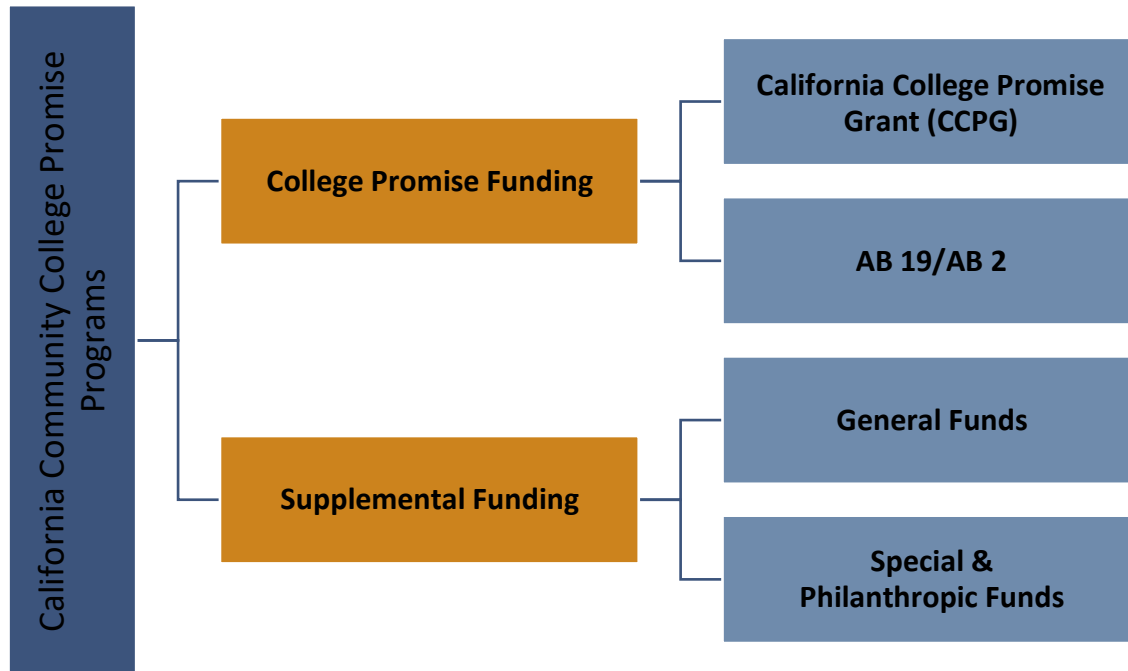
California College Promise Grant

CCPG is an entitlement that waives tuition for dependent community college students from families with low income or independent students with low income. This funding follows the student, meaning that a student receives this funding regardless of which community college they attend and whether or not they participate in a College Promise program. Across the system, 44 percent of students received CCPG. The average amount of tuition waiver for all CCPG students, including those who enroll part-time, was $798 in 2021/22.[8] When CCPG-eligible students participate in a College Promise program, this funding is leveraged to cover their tuition and therefore minimize program costs.

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[8] Due to limitations with publicly available data, we are not able to identify the CCPG students who participate in College Promise programs.

AB 19/AB 2 Funding

College Promise funding from AB 19 and AB 2 legislation, named California College Promise, is allocated to colleges based on the average cost of tuition for the number of full-time students who are not eligible for CCPG at each college (non-CCPG students). Although the funding formula uses tuition expenditures to determine the level of funding for each college, the legislation allows flexibility in how the funding is used as long as the expenditures are aligned with the goals of the legislation: to close achievement gaps; improve college readiness; and increase persistence, completion, and transfer rates. If colleges use AB 19/AB 2 funding for full-time non-CCPG students and leverage CCPG for eligible students, programs should be able to cover all tuition expenses through the state's College Promise funding streams.

Supplemental Funding

Supplemental College Promise funding are the financial resources that are not designated specifically for College Promise through state legislation. Unlike funding that is explicitly intended for College Promise use, when supplemental funds are allocated to College Promise programs, we interpret this to indicate that the college prioritizes College Promise. The variation in the type and level of these funding streams in program budgets drives distinctions across College Promise program funding models. Thus, we use supplemental funding streams as the primary organizing feature for the typology presented in this study. We created two subcategories of supplemental funding: general funds and special and philanthropic funds.

General Funds

General funds are the minimum guaranteed funding for California Community Colleges from the state[9] and local property tax revenue that can be used for general operations (State of California Department of Finance, 2011; Petek, 2023). This guaranteed funding is both reliable and unconstrained. When colleges allocate general funds to College Promise, it signals a level of commitment to the program.

Special and Philanthropic Funds

Special and philanthropic funds include all funding other than the state's College Promise funding and general funds. While several types of funding are placed in this category, they are grouped together because they are considered more difficult than general funds to access and allocate to College Promise programs.

- *Categorical funding.* In the state budget, categorical funding is legislatively mandated allocations that are designed to provide student support services to "improve educational outcomes, reduce equity, achievement and regional gaps, to address basic needs such as food and housing insecurity, and to help increase college affordability" (CCCCO, 2021). Examples of categorical funding that was allocated to College Promise programs include the Student Equity and Achievement Program (SEAP) and Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS).[10] Compared to general funds, categorical funding is more difficult to allocate to College Promise due to funding restrictions, and it is less reliable because legislative priorities can shift over time.

[9] The California General Fund is the principal operating fund for the majority of governmental activities and consists of all money received in the Treasury that is not required by law to be credited to any other fund.

[10] In 2018, the CCCCO merged three existing initiatives—the Student Success and Support Program, the Basic Skills Initiative, and Student Equity—to create the SEAP to "advance the goal of demolishing once and for all the achievement gaps for students from traditionally underrepresented populations" (CCCCO, n.d.-c). The EOPS provides students who are disadvantaged by social, economic, educational, or linguistic barriers with the resources they need to enroll and succeed by providing comprehensive academic and support counseling, financial aid, and other services aimed at keeping students from dropping out and helping them reach their educational and career goals (CCCCO, n.d.-a).

- *Philanthropy*. Funding priorities at foundations can shift over time. Even if funds were allocated to College Promise in the past, there is no certainty that this funding will continue to be granted. Further, grants won by College Promise programs are typically for a fixed period and are therefore unreliable sources of ongoing program funding.

- *Local ballot initiative*. One program in the study secured funding through an ongoing local ballot initiative. This is more reliable than one-time grants or short-term philanthropic commitments, but it can also be vulnerable to political or fiscal changes.

- *Limited-time federal funding*. Four programs in the sample used funding from the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF)[11] to support their College Promise programs. HEERF was federal funding that was allocated to institutions of higher education to serve students and ensure that learning continues during the COVID-19 pandemic (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security [CARES] Act, 2020; Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations [CRRSAA] Act, 2021; American Rescue Plan [ARP] Act of 2021, 2021). This short-term funding is an unreliable funding stream.

Expenditures

The research team explored the relationship between funding models and program expenditures using the following measures. The average per student expenditures were based on the total number of students in the programs in each financial model rather than the number of programs in each model.

Tuition

The total tuition spent on program participants is included in this measure regardless of funding stream (CCPG, AB 19/AB 2, or other funding).[12] Each program reported the total tuition for all program participants based on the number of units enrolled. All programs require students to enroll in at least 12 units; some students take additional units and will therefore have higher tuition costs.

Ten of the 13 programs in our sample reported fall tuition rather than tuition for the entire academic year. To annualize these data, we doubled the tuition costs.[13] We calculated per student tuition by dividing the total tuition costs for all students within each financial model by the number of students who participated in the programs in that model.

Nontuition Fees

Nontuition fees included all of the student fees that are paid for by the program. All but five programs in the analysis covered all nontuition fees required by the college. Although the types of required nontuition fees varied by college, most included health fees and a student body fee.

Additional Financial Support

Additional financial support included all monetary support that program participants received beyond tuition and sometimes fees. Examples of this support include funding for books and materials, transportation, and monthly incentives. One program provided a flat dollar amount to their participants. To calculate additional financial support, we subtracted the tuition and fees costs from the grants the students received. For non-CCPG students, we subtracted all tuition and fees from the grant amount. Because CCPG students had their tuition waived, we subtracted fees from the grant amount.

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[11] See https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/arp.html for more information.

[12] The CCPG follows the student; therefore, programs may not consider this funding to be part of their budgets. We include program participant tuition covered by the CCPG as a revenue stream in this analysis to capture accurate program budgets, which can be useful information for programs inside and outside of California.

[13] By doubling the first semester tuition expenditures, the total annual tuition levels may be over- or underestimated due to variation in the number of units taken and potential program attrition in the second term.

Total Staff Salaries

The salaries of all staff associated with the College Promise programs are included in the staff salary measure based on the percentage of time they worked on the program. We used this broad definition of staff to accurately capture the cost of staff time regardless of the funding source for their salaries. Typical staff positions include those who administer the program, respond to student inquiries, and communicate with students through in-person and online modalities. Support staff may include counselors, tutors, workshop facilitators, peer mentors, and others who directly support students. Staff who indirectly support the program and participants might include financial aid officers who identify students who are eligible for CCPG, outreach and marketing staff who share information about the program to potential students, and staff from institutional research and admissions and records.

When salary data were missing, the research team identified the staff member on the college's website and found their salary in [Transparent California](.)[14] When multiple staff members had the same salary (e.g., counselors), we assigned the average salary for each staff member.

Total Program Cost per Student

Total program cost per student is the total cost of the program (including tuition waivers covered by CCPG) divided by the total number of students participating. Although programs may not consider tuition waivers to be part of their budgets, they are included to accurately reflect the program cost.

Equity Measures

The following sections describe the data used to measure the three equity categories in this analysis: sustainability, robustness, and inclusiveness. Detailed descriptions of these measures are also included in the previous revenue sources and expenditure sections.

Sustainability Measures

Sustainability was measured by the percentage of reliable funding sources in program budgets. The following sections identify the measures and describe the extent to which we consider them to be sustainable streams of program financing.

College Promise Funding Sources

Of the two College Promise funding sources, CCPG is an entitlement and is therefore highly reliable. The other College Promise funding source, AB 19/AB 2, is also reliable, but the level of funding may vary slightly over time based on the state's annual budget. The funding formula for AB 19/AB 2 is based on the number of each college's non-CCPG full-time students; therefore, a college's annual allocation will change with that population. Other factors may also impact funding levels. For example, the proportion of funding for all colleges changed in 2022/23 because a new community college was established, but the funding level remained the same.

Supplemental Funding Sources

General funds are a reliable resource for colleges. However, there is variation in whether and to what extent a College Promise program benefits financially from this funding stream. Most general funds were used to cover salaries for staff who spent part of their time supporting College Promise, but some general funds covered full-time program administrators or counselors who were dedicated to College Promise students. The extent to which programs could rely on general funds was dependent upon decisions made by college leaders and was subject to changing priorities, shifting political winds, and leadership turnover.

Special and philanthropic funds, including categorical, philanthropic, and local and limited-time federal legislative funding, are less reliable than general funds. Categorical and legislative funds can be difficult to allocate to College Promise programs based on legislative or other requirements. There are several factors that make private philanthropic dollars unreliable, including the overall economic outlook, changes in

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[14] Transparent California data were from 2021, corresponding to the year of data used for this analysis.

foundation fundraising goals, and the giving capacity of the community. The least reliable funding source in our program budgets was federal limited-time COVID-related funding (HEERF).

Robustness Measures

Two measures of robustness were used in these analyses. The first was the total amount of additional financial support per student, excluding tuition and fees. The second measure of robustness was the total staff cost per student. We used both measures as proxies for the level of direct and indirect support that program participants receive. We considered programs with higher additional financial support and higher investment in staff to be more robust.

Inclusiveness Measures

Program inclusiveness was measured in two ways: the share of students with low income in the program and the share of students with low income on campus who participate in the program. We considered programs to be more equitable if they had higher shares of participants with low income.

While students with low income are one student group that is historically underrepresented in higher education, it is certainly not the only one. Due to data limitations, other student groups, such as adults, part-time students, students who are undocumented, youth formerly in foster care, and students of color, are not part of our inclusiveness measures. A broader definition of inclusiveness could have a very different relationship to funding models. For example, if participation by students who are undocumented was an inclusiveness measure, there may be a very different relationship between the measure and the models we defined because supplemental funding sources are more flexible and can be used to include those students.

Share of College Promise Participants Who Have Low Income

The first inclusiveness measure is the share of students with low income (those receiving CCPG) in the program. We calculated this by dividing the number of CCPG students who participated in the College Promise program by the total number of College Promise participants.

Share of Collegewide Students With Low Income in the Program

The second measure is the share of students with low income on campus who participated in the program. This was calculated by dividing the number of CCPG students who participated in the College Promise program by the number of CCPG students across the campus who were eligible for College Promise (first-time, full-time students in their 1st and 2nd years of enrollment).

Data Collection Challenges

The research team encountered multiple challenges related to data in conducting this study. The primary challenge was data access. The CCCCO does not systematically collect the College Promise program data needed for this study. Currently, the system gathers only two data points from colleges concerning the allocation of AB 19/AB 2 funding: the dollar amount allocated to tuition waivers and the amount allocated directly to students for other expenses, such as nontuition fees, books, and transportation. To comprehensively understand the financial framework of these programs, we found it necessary to gather detailed data, including the type and percentage of time that staff dedicated to the program, the socioeconomic status of student participants, the benefits the students received, and the funding sources for all program features and benefits (see Appendix A).

The absence of centralized state data required the research team to collect data directly from each college, introducing several complexities. First, College Promise programs typically perceived their funding as confined to the scope of their financial management, often restricting their budget considerations to AB 19/AB 2 funding, given its direct application to program costs. To accurately determine the true cost of each program along with the funding streams that were leveraged to cover those costs, program contacts needed to broaden their perception of what constitutes their program budgets. For example, they may not have considered the salaries of all staff who supported the program and its students as part of the total program cost. To gather these data, program contacts often had to reach out to their partners and other

departments to understand the amount of time that each staff member spent on College Promise activities and the funding sources that covered their salaries.

At the beginning of the study, the research team updated the existing database of California College Promise programs. We started by collecting information from online sources, but some of the information we were seeking was not readily available, requiring us to contact College Promise leaders. In many cases, our previous program contacts were no longer in their positions, requiring us to identify new contacts. Many of the new project contacts joined the programs after the 2021/22 academic year, which was the year of the study. In these cases, they lacked knowledge of the historical context of the program. Furthermore, they typically lacked access to the data on student participants, student benefits, and the funding streams that supported these costs. Also, data for most programs were stored in more than one department (e.g., Financial Aid, Institutional Research), complicating the data collection process. Finally, our program contacts had limited capacity to engage with our study and support our data collection efforts given their other responsibilities and priorities.

FINDINGS

FUNDING MODELS FOR CALIFORNIA COLLEGE PROMISE PROGRAMS: REVENUE SOURCES (Research Question 1)

This study included 13 College Promise programs across 24 community college campuses that serve a total of 29,402 students (Table 3). Programs ranged in size from 113 to 6,898 participants, with an average size of 2,262. On average, the program cost per student was $1,707. The lowest cost per student was $1,027, and the highest cost per student was $4,121.

To develop the framework for California College Promise funding models, we examined the funding sources for the 13 programs in the analytic sample for the 2021/22 academic year. First, we identified and categorized all funding streams in the program budgets. We then calculated the share of the total program budget for each of the funding sources.

In general, programs in this study relied heavily on College Promise funding for support. Across all programs, College Promise funding made up an average of 82 percent of total program budgets (43% was from CCPG and 39% was from AB 19/AB 2; see Table 3). Supplemental funding sources made up the other 18 percent of all program budgets on average. Ten percent of that supplemental funding came from general funds, and 8 percent came from special and philanthropic funds.

The four College Promise models described in this paper are organized to capture their level of financial commitment to College Promise. Because the variation in state College Promise funding to each program is due to legislative requirements rather than college- or district-level decisions, the primary way we measure financial commitment is the level of supplemental funding (i.e., the percentage share of general funds and special and philanthropic funds in program budgets).

Model A programs had high levels of supplemental funding; programs in Models B and C had moderate levels of supplemental funding, with variation by subcategories of this funding; and Model D programs had the lowest levels of supplemental funding (Table 2).[15]

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[15] The opposite is the case with the percentage share of College Promise funding. Model D programs had the highest average share of College Promise funding, followed by Models B and C. The lowest average percentage share of College Promise funding was in Model A programs.

TABLE 2.

Levels of Supplemental Funding Sources, by Model

	Total supplemental funding	Supplemental funding sources	
		General funds	*Special and philanthropic funds*
Model A	High	High	High
Model B	Moderate (from general funds)	Moderate	None
Model C	Moderate (from special and philanthropic funds)	Low	Moderate
Model D	Very low	Low	Low

Notes. High levels are green, moderate levels are yellow, and low levels are red. Supplemental and College Promise funding sources sum to 100%.

Funding Model A: High Supplemental Funding

Funding Model A includes two College Promise programs that serve a total of 1,482 students in four community colleges. Programs range in size from 118 to 1,369 students (Table 3). The average per student expenditure was $2,447, and the average total program budget for Model A programs was $2,462,781. The budgets for these two programs had the highest average percentage of supplemental funds (68%) compared to the average for the other models that ranged from 4 percent to 12 percent. General funds made up nearly half (46%) of program budgets in this group compared to a 10 percent average across all programs. Also unique to Model A programs was the percentage of the budgets that came from special and philanthropic funding sources, including grants, donations, and funding from a county measure. On average, 22 percent of the budgets were composed of these sources compared to an average of 8 percent across all programs. The high levels of investment from both general funds and special and philanthropic funds suggest that the colleges with Model A programs have a significant commitment to College Promise programming.

TABLE 3.

Percentage Share of Types of California College Promise Funding, Overall and by Funding Model

	Overall	Model A	Model B	Model C	Model D
		High supplemental funding	*Moderate supplemental funding from general funds*	*Moderate supplemental funding from special & philanthropic funds*	*Very low supplemental funding*
	Average	*Average*	*Percentage*	*Average*	*Average*
Total College Promise funding sources (range)	82%	32% (30%–33%)	88%	88% (81%–93%)	96% (89%–100%)
California College Promise Grant (CCPG) (range)	43%	19% (13%–23%)	57%	55% (43%–59%)	39% (0%–85%)
California College Promise legislation (AB 19/AB 2) (range)	39%	13% (6%–20%)	31%	32% (22%–45%)	57% (15%–94%)
Total supplemental funding sources (range)	18%	68% (67%–70%)	12%	12% (7%–19%)	4% (0%–11%)
General funds (range)	10%	46%	12%	1% (0%–3%)	3% (0%–8%)
Special & philanthropic funds (range)	8%	22% (21%–24%)	0%	11% (6%–17%)	2% (0%–3%)
Average program size (range)	2,262 (113–6,898)	741 (113–1,369)	6,898	2,472 (992–4,711)	1,733 (692–3,882)

	Overall	Model A	Model B	Model C	Model D
		High supplemental funding	Moderate supplemental funding from general funds	Moderate supplemental funding from special & philanthropic funds	Very low supplemental funding
	Average	*Average*	*Percentage*	*Average*	*Average*
Average total program cost (range)	$3,897,788 ($465,633–$11,689,449)	$2,462,781 ($465,633–$4,459,929)	$11,689,449	$3,993,312 ($1,771,482–$7,389,879)	$2,817,712 ($1,429,672–$4,074,918)
Average per student cost (range)	$1,707	$2,447 ($2,347–$4,121)	$1,695	$1,650 ($1,511–$1,786)	$1,626 ($1,027–$3,778)
Students (*N*)	29,402	1,482	6,898	12,359	8,663
Programs (*N*)	13	2	1	5	5
Colleges (*N*)	24	4	10	5	5

Notes. Total percentages in the table are rounded to the nearest whole number. Twelve of the 14 programs in the analysis are based in a single community college, while the other two programs are organized at the district level. The district-level Model A program includes three colleges, and the district-level Model B program includes ten colleges. The total number of College Promise program participants (the sum of 1st-year and 2nd-year program participants) was used to calculate the per student cost for each spending category. In one case, 3rd-year funding is provided to some students; the total number of students from all 3 years was added to calculate the per student cost for this program. The average program size (students) is the sum of the number of program participants from each program within each funding model.

Funding Model B: Moderate Supplemental Funding From General Funds

Funding Model B includes a single district-level program that serves 6,898 students in 10 community colleges (Table 3).[16] The total program budget for the Model B program was $11,689,449, with an average per student expenditure of $1,695. This program has a moderate share of supplemental funds (12%). Although the average share of supplemental funds in Model C programs is also 12 percent, in Model B programs these funds are exclusively from general funds—there is no funding from special or philanthropic sources. The high level of general funds directed to the program indicates a district-level commitment to College Promise, but this is tempered by the lack of special and philanthropic funding.

Funding Model C: Moderate Supplemental Funding From Special and Philanthropic Funds

Model C includes five single-college programs serving a total of 12,359 students (Table 3). Programs in Model C range in size from 992 to 4,455 students, with the average program serving 2,421 students. The average total program budget for Model C programs was $3,993,312, with an average per student expenditure of $1,650. Like the Model B program, Model C programs are characterized by having a moderate percentage (12%) of supplemental funding. Unlike Model B, however, these funds are mainly from special and philanthropic funds (11%), with a very low share of general funds (1.4%). Thus, 88 percent of Model C budgets were from College Promise funding sources (CCPG and AB 19/AB 2). On average and compared to the other models, Model C program budgets included a higher percentage of special and philanthropic funds and low levels of general funds.

Funding Model D: Very Low Supplemental Funding

Funding Model D includes five programs, each at a single community college, that serve a total of 8,663 students (Table 3). The average per student expenditure for Model D programs was $1,626, and the average total program budget for Model D was $2,817,712. The budgets for these programs are characterized by having the lowest percentage of supplemental funding (4%). Thus, these programs were heavily reliant on College Promise funding sources, making up an average of 96 percent of their budgets. Model D programs are almost exclusively funded by state-designated College Promise funding, suggesting a lower level of commitment to College Promise than the other programs in this analysis.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FUNDING MODELS AND PROGRAM EXPENDITURES (Research Question 2)

Program expenditure categories are tuition, fees, additional financial support, and staff costs. The average amount of tuition expenditures per student was fairly similar within (and across) models because all programs required participants to enroll in at least 12 units per term, and tuition costs are established at the state level.[17] Thus, variation in the share of tuition expenditures in program budgets is largely a function of the other expenditures.

Because tuition expenditures per student were similar, and the two state-level College Promise funding sources can cover tuition for program participants, we expected that the models with higher average shares of supplemental funding in their budgets would allocate more funding to nontuition fees, additional financial support, and program staffing. Therefore, we hypothesized that Model A would

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[16] Although 10 colleges are represented in this program, it is considered a single program, and therefore no average or range is reported.

[17] Tuition for some participants in a Model A program was not funded through CCPG or AB 19/AB 2 but through other financial aid. Data on these funding streams were not provided to our team, so the tuition cost per student may be slightly lower than that of the other programs in the analysis.

allocate the highest percentage of funding to these expenditures, followed by Models B and C. Model D would have the lowest percentage of allocations to these expenditures. The data suggest that this hypothesis was largely correct.

We found a positive relationship between supplemental funding and the total program cost per student. The average cost per student for Model A was $2,447, notably higher than the average across all programs in the analysis ($1,707) (Table 4). The two models with moderate supplemental funding (Models B and C) followed the same pattern. The average total cost per student was close to the overall average at $1,695 and $1,650, respectively. Model D program expenditures are more varied and unique, with an average total cost per student of $1,626, which is only slightly less than Models B and C despite having the lowest levels of supplemental funding. This unexpected result is due to the spending structure of one of the Model D program where the vast majority of AB 19/AB 2 funding was given to students as a single dollar amount.

The average allocation to staffing showed a similar pattern. Model A programs allocated $1,303 per student, notably less than the average across all programs ($292) (Table 4). Models B and C allocated less than Model A programs ($229 and $226, respectively), and Model D programs allocated only slightly less than Models B and C, which is more than we would have expected given low average supplemental funding in these programs.

Model D programs continued to be the exception to the anticipated pattern when we compared average expenditures on additional financial support across models. The Model A average expenditure on financial support ($272) was higher than the overall average ($210), followed by Models B ($179) and C ($162) (Table 4). Rather than being the lowest expenditure of additional financial support, Model D programs spent an average of $286 per student, the highest of all models.

The positive relationship between supplemental funds and expenditures outside of tuition was also clear when we looked at the share of nontuition fees. Across all programs, the average cost of nontuition fees is $40 per student (Table 4). Model A, the financial model with the highest proportion of supplemental funding in its budget, spent the most on nontuition fees, almost twice that of the overall average at $72 per student. Models B and C, both with moderate levels of supplemental funding, hovered around the average, at $37 and $50, respectively. The programs with the least amount of supplemental funding (Model D) spent an average of $20, exactly half of the overall average.

Table 4.

College Promise Program Expenditures per Student, Overall and by Funding Model

	Overall	Model A	Model B	Model C	Model D
		High supplemental funding	*Moderate supplemental funding from general funds*	*Moderate supplemental funding from special and philanthropic funds*	*Very low supplemental funding*
	Average	*Average*	*Values*	*Average*	*Average*
Tuition (range)	$1,166	$801 ($774–$1,243)	$1,249	$1,211 ($1,104–$1,407)	$1,123 ($900–$1,448)
Nontuition fees (range)	$40	$72 ($0–$76)	$37	$50 ($0–$169)	$20 ($0–$110)
Additional financial support (range)	$210	$272 ($255–$557)	$179	$162 ($58–$311)	$286 ($26–$2,146)
Staff salaries (range)	$292	$1,303 ($1,242–$2,321)	$229	$226 ($65–$342)	$197 ($101–$427)
Total per student cost (range)	$1,707	$2,447 ($2,347–$4,121)	$1,695	$1,650 ($1,511–$1,786)	$1,626 ($1,027–$3,778)
Program size (*N*) (range)	2,283	1,007 (113–1,900)	6,898	2421 (992–4,455)	1,733 (692–3,882)
Average total program cost (range)	$3,897,788 ($465,633–$11,689,449)	$2,462,781 ($465,633–$4,459,929)	$11,689,449	$3,993,312 ($1,771,482–$7,389,879)	$2,817,712 ($1,429,672–$4,074,918)
Students (*N*)	29,402	1,482	6,898	12,359	8,663

	Overall	Model A	Model B	Model C	Model D
		High supplemental funding	Moderate supplemental funding from general funds	Moderate supplemental funding from special and philanthropic funds	Very low supplemental funding
	Average	*Average*	*Values*	*Average*	*Average*
Programs (*N*)	13	2	1	5	5
Colleges (*N*)	24	4	10	5	5

Notes. Twelve of the 14 programs in the analysis are based in a single community college, while the other two programs are organized at the district level. The district-level Model A program includes three colleges, and the district-level Model B program includes ten colleges. The total number of College Promise program participants (the sum of 1st-year and 2nd-year program participants) was used to calculate the per student cost for each spending category. In one case, 3rd-year funding is provided to some students; the total number of students from all 3 years was added to calculate the per student cost for this program. The average program size (students) is the sum of the number of program participants from each program within each funding model.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FUNDING MODELS AND EQUITY (Research Question 3)

Equity: Sustainability and Funding Models

Due to California's two College Promise funding streams (CCPG and AB 19/AB 2), programs at California's community colleges are more sustainable than many college or community-based programs in other states. There is, however, some variation in the level of sustainability across the programs and financial models in this analysis.

We used the overall share of the two College Promise funding sources in the budget as the primary measure of sustainability. As an entitlement to students, CCPG is the most sustainable of these two sources, followed by AB 19/AB 2, which is intended for College Promise but can be allocated elsewhere. Thus, models with higher shares of College Promise funding sources, particularly CCPG, are more sustainable. Supplemental funding sources (general funds and special and philanthropic funds) are less reliable than College Promise funding. The general funds category is the third most sustainable funding stream because it can be directed away from College Promise; it is followed by special and philanthropic funds, which are most difficult to obtain and may not be ongoing sources of funding.

Model D programs had the highest level of sustainability, with an average of 96 percent of their budget coming from the two College Promise sources, 39 percent of which was from CCPG, the most reliable funding stream (Table 3). A slightly smaller average share (88%) of the budgets in Models C and B came from the two College Promise funding streams, with only a slight percentage difference in the share of CCPG funding between these two models—57 percent for Model B and 55 percent for Model C. Model A programs were the least sustainable, with an average of a 32 percent share of College Promise funding streams in their budgets.

The subcategories of supplemental funding in program budgets can also help us understand program financial sustainability. Model A programs, for example, have a high percentage of supplemental funding in their budgets, which suggests low financial sustainability. However, almost 50 percent of their budgets, on average, are covered by general funds, which are fairly reliable sources of funding for programs, especially since they are primarily used for permanent staff who allocate part of their time to support the programs. The Model B program also appeared to be highly sustainable because all of their funding came from general funds (12%) and the state's two reliable College Promise funding streams (88%).

Equity: Robustness and Funding Models

To further explore the relationship between funding models and equity, we examined the levels of program robustness as measured by the amount of total staff salaries per student and additional financial support per student. Under the assumption that models with programs that provide higher levels of financial support to students and higher levels of staffing were more robust, we expected Model A programs to be the most robust, followed by Models B and C and then D (Table 4). The data confirm the expected relationship between funding models and robustness; however, high within-model variation suggests a weak overall relationship between the financial models and robustness.

Total Staff Salaries per Student

Models with higher average supplemental funding allocated more resources to staff salaries. The highest average level of staff costs per student was in Model A programs ($1,303), followed by Model B ($229) and Model C ($226). Model D programs spent the least on staff, with the per student cost at $197 (Table 4). There was considerable variation within each model in the amount allocated to staff salaries. In Model C, for example, the lowest staff salary allocation was $65 per student, and the highest was $342 per student.

Across programs, staff costs were most correlated with the share of supplemental funding (0.9), with a closer relationship to general funds (0.89) than to special and philanthropic funds (0.72). This

corresponds to what we know about how staff are typically funded. Program-specific positions such as coordinators are generally funded with special and philanthropic funds or AB 19/AB 2 (though the correlation with the share of AB 19/AB 2 is negative [-0.37], because   programs that have a larger share of funding from this source overall spend less on staff per student), while salaries for staff who support the program from other departments (e.g., financial aid or admissions and records) are covered through general funds. Programs with higher shares of CCPG funding tended to spend less on staff.

Additional Financial Support

Additional financial support also generally fits the expected pattern: Model A programs provided students with an average of $272 of additional financial support, which is higher than the overall average of $210 (Table 4). The expected pattern continues with Models B and C providing students with slightly less additional financial support ($179 and $162, respectively). The exception was in Model D. This model broke the pattern, just as it did with the analysis on program expenditures, due to one Model D program that allocated funding directly to students rather than waiving tuition and other expenses. There was also variation within models in the amount of additional financial support per student. The largest variation was among Model D programs, in which the lowest level of additional financial support per student was $26 and the highest was $2,146. Similarly, additional financial support in Model A was $557 per student for one program and less than half that amount ($255) per student for the other.

Additional financial support was not highly correlated to College Promise funding as a whole (0.07) because of competing relationships between AB 19/AB 2 and CCPG. Programs that used more CCPG tended to give less support (-0.46), while programs that used more AB 19/AB 2 funding provided more (0.49). This is consistent with what we know about how programs fund additional support, which is primarily through AB 19.

Equity: Inclusiveness and Funding Models

Our inclusiveness measures (the share of program participants who have low income and the share of students who have low income on campus who participate in College Promise) were not directly related to the primary measures used to create our funding models (supplemental funding streams). Thus, we expected a weak relationship between funding model and inclusiveness.

For both measures of inclusiveness, models with lower average shares of supplemental funding were found to be more inclusive. Model D programs had the lowest levels of supplemental funding and were the most inclusive, with an average of an 80 percent share of program participants with low income and an average share of 65 percent of students with low income in the college who participated in the program (Table 5). The second most inclusive programs were Models B and C, with only slightly lower levels of inclusiveness than Model D. Model A was the least inclusive, with notably lower averages of 45 percent of program participants from low-income backgrounds and only 12 percent of students with low income in the school who participated in the programs.

Table 5.

Inclusiveness Measures: Shares of California College Promise Program Participants With Low Income, Overall and by Funding Model

	Overall	Model A	Model B	Model C	Model D
		High supplemental funding	*Moderate supplemental funding from general funds*	*Moderate supplemental funding from special and philanthropic funds*	*Very low supplemental funding*
	Average	*Average*	*Percentage*	*Average*	*Average*
Share of program students who have low income (range)	77%	45% (42%–73%)	78%	78% (68%–83%)	80% (50%–98%)
Share of students with low income on campus who participate in College Promise (range)	37%	12% (6%–14%)	39%	31% (11%–56%)	65% (23%–100%)

There are wide ranges of within-model variation for both measures of inclusiveness. For example, the share of program participants who are students with low income was 50 percent for one Model D program and 98 percent for another (Table 5). Among the Model C programs, the smallest share of students with low income in the college who participated in the program was 11 percent, and the largest share was 56 percent. These differences suggest an overall mild relationship between the funding models and measures of inclusiveness, which is supported by the relatively small correlation between supplemental funding and the share of students who have low income .[18]

Across models, we observed a similar relationship between the two inclusiveness measures. First, the average share of program participants with low income was higher than the average share of students with low income at the colleges who participated in the program. For example, the average percentage of students with low income who participated in Model C programs was 78 percent, while the average percentage of students with low income in the college who participated in the programs was only 31 percent (Table 5). This pattern may be the result of programs having eligibility requirements that exclude CCPG students from participating or of colleges not ensuring that all eligible students, especially students with low income, are participating.

Equity: Overall Findings

The data suggest that there is a tradeoff between robustness and the other two categories of program equity. The most robust programs (Model A) are the least sustainable and the least inclusive (Table 6). To provide this high level of support, programs may need to institute eligibility requirements that limit the type of student who participates and the total number of students they can serve. Although they drew

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[18] The correlation between the share of supplemental funding and the share of program participants who are low-income is -0.167, indicating a weak and negative relationship. The correlation between the share of supplemental funding and the share of campuswide students with low income who participate in the program is -0.418, indicating a relatively strong relationship despite high levels of variation in that measure.

from different sources of supplemental funding, programs in Models B and C were largely similar to each other. They provided higher levels of support than Model D programs but served lower shares of students with low income and so were less inclusive.

Table 6.

Equity Measures, Averages per Model

	Sustainability	Robustness		Inclusiveness	
	Share of budget from College Promise funding	*Total staff salaries per student*	*Additional financial support per student*	*Share of program participants who have low income*	*Share of students with low income on campus who participate in college promise*
Model A	32%	$1,303	$272	45%	12%
Model B	88%	$229	$179	78%	39%
Model C	88%	$226	$165	78%	31%
Model D	96%	$179	$286*	80%	65%

Note. High levels are green, moderate levels are yellow, and low levels are red.

* The high level of additional financial support per student in Model D is inflated due to a single program that provides a flat financial amount per student rather than covering tuition and fees separately.

CONCLUSION

California is the state with the largest number of College Promise programs in the country, most of which are housed in community colleges. The wide range of program structures provided an opportunity to understand their patterns of funding by creating a funding models framework.

After identifying the types and relative shares of each funding stream for each program, we grouped programs with similar characteristics together into four funding models (A–D) and explored the relationship between these funding models and the way that programs allocated their funding. We organized these models by the two funding streams with the most variation across programs, which fall outside of the state's guaranteed College Promise funding—CCPG and AB 19/AB 2. We refer to these funds—general funds and special and philanthropic funds—as supplemental funds.

Model A programs had high levels of supplemental funding in their budgets. Models B and C had moderate levels of supplemental funding, differing by the relative percentage of general funds (higher in Model B) and special and philanthropic funds (higher in Model C). Model D programs had the lowest percentage of supplemental funding in their budgets.

We found evidence of a tradeoff between robustness and the other components of equity—sustainability and inclusiveness. The most robust programs leveraged more supplemental funding and were more limited in the number of students they served.

To ensure sufficient support for all students, programs must provide robust supports beyond tuition and fees. We found that, on average, program models with higher supplemental funding (Model A and in decreasing levels for Models, B, C, D) were more robust and allocated more funding to financial and student services support beyond tuition but tended to include fewer students with low income and thus were less inclusive.

One program in Model D leveraged a unique design that was both robust and inclusive. This program provided direct grants of equal and significant value to all program participants, that is, CCPG students received the same grant as non-CCPG students, in addition to their CCPG tuition waiver. So, all program participants received robust support, and students with low income effectively received a larger and more equitable amount. This program had the second highest per student expenditure, on par with Model A programs, and the highest additional financial support, while also including in the program more than half of their campus's eligible students with low income.

If this program is excluded from the analysis, the tradeoff between robustness and other equity components is consistent across all funding categories. These findings suggest that students receive both financial and nonfinancial supports when programs have budgets that exceed coverage for tuition and have relatively unconstrained funding. Students who have historically been marginalized can especially benefit from this additional support.

To increase equitable access to programs in California, the state can provide additional reliable College Promise funding streams. Ideally, this funding would be flexible enough to allow programs to allocate funding in ways that respond to the needs of their students while also incentivizing decision makers to work toward their equity goals. However, our results also indicate that if institutions are unable to supplement funding for their programs, which could be the reality for many community colleges, they still may be able to serve students in a relatively stable way.

Recommendations and Future Work

Understanding how programs structure themselves across different funding models may be useful to stakeholders at other state- and local-level College Promise programs who are designing or improving their programs to increase equity and are strengthening and expanding upon their financial structures. Based on our analyses, we provide several recommendations that can expand upon our understanding of the relationship between state and other supplemental funding to serve students equitably:

- **Improve data collection and use.** Collecting data for this project proved to be quite challenging. We had to rely on the colleges to share the data because the state does not collect student-level participant data or data on program funding or expenditures other than AB 19/AB 2. The data we sought were not included in colleges' data infrastructure, so program leaders had to either gather the data themselves or request data elements from colleagues in other departments. These data limitations hindered our ability to understand whether and how College Promise programs work.

  o *Student Data.* To examine equity in College Promise programs, we need to know who is participating in them. If student-level data within and across College Promise programs were gathered by the state and shared with researchers, data would not have to be gathered at the program level. Access to state level student data would also enable us to expand our measure of inclusiveness beyond students with low income (CCPG) to include students from all historically marginalized groups. We would also be able to use persistence and completion data to analyze the equitable impact of programs.

  o *Expenditure Data.* To understand how College Promise programs are operating, we need to know what resources are coming into the program and how they are being used. These data are central to understanding program costs and returns to investment, as well as identifying best practices for resource allocation. College Promise programs in California community colleges operate and leverage funding in many different ways and this variation is a rich source of information. At a minimum, states should require institutions to report funding source and expenditure data on staffing, program activities, and direct financial support to students.

o Having access to accurate student and expenditure data would allow us to make substantial contributions to our understanding of College Promise programs. With variation in program design and funding strategies across a large number of colleges and a large population of diverse students, the California context provides a unique opportunity to learn about the relative impacts of different College Promise program features and funding strategies. This knowledge would be valuable in identifying best practices to guide and support program development and design that would maximize equitable program outcomes in California and more broadly.

● **Provide resources to college and program leaders to help identify potential funding sources and to strategically allocate funds to maximize impact and achieve their goals.**

● **Provide information to colleges and program leaders on the policy and regulatory environment, including how changes in state, institutional, or other grant aid may impact services, sustainability, or both.**

● **Continue to allow programs to have flexibility in the way they allocate state College Promise funding, allowing them the opportunity to focus on students with the most need.**

● **Examine financial models from other states.** Researchers can use and expand upon the framework outlined in this report to categorize College Promise financial models. The structure we developed to measure program equity can also be applied to a broader set of programs in California and throughout the country to deepen our collective understanding of equity and how measures of equity relate to funding structures. Including a larger number of programs could also result in a richer understanding of the variation and structure of program financial models.

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Appendix A. California College Promise Data Collection Template

California College Promise Funding Models Project Funded by the Kresge Foundation

Program Name: Program and college name

Directions: Please provide information in the four tables below for the 2021/22 academic year.

Please include all staff who spent time working on your College Promise program in the 2021/22 academic year regardless of the budget that was used to pay staff salary.

Typical College Promise titles or roles include, but are not limited to, College Promise program (Director, Assistant Director, Coordinator, Administrative Assistant, etc.), Admission and records, Counseling, Financial aid, Student services, Equity, Outreach, Marketing and public information, Professional experts, Peer mentors, Foundation staff, Library and Learning Center (book-lending program)

Table A1.

Staffing

	College Promise program staff salary information (The 3 columns after "Total Salary" should equal 100%)				Time commitment to College Promise
Title or role (if you combine several positions in one row [e.g., 5 student mentors], please indicate the number of staff)	*Total salary (or classification and step) (base rate preferred; please indicate if you are listing the loaded rate)*	*% of 12-month FTE paid by AB 19/AB 2*	*% of 12-month FTE paid by general funds*	*% of 12-month FTE paid by other funding sources (Please list each funding source and the % covered by it)*	*% of 12-month FTE spent on College Promise program*

Please complete the table on tuition and fees for the 2021/22 academic year.

	Year 1 students in fall 2021	Year 2 students in fall 2021 (students who initially registered fall 2020)
Total number of College Promise students		
How many CCPG students are enrolled in your college in their 1st year and in their 2nd year?	Number of CCPG students in their 1st year:	Number of CCPG students in their 2nd year:
How many first-time, full-time students are enrolled in your college? How many first-time students enrolled full-time in your college for their 2nd year?	Number of first-time, full-time students in their 1st year:	Number of students who enrolled full-time for their 2nd year:
Total number of College Promise students with tuition waiver paid by AB 19/AB 2 (and total cost)	Number of students fall 2021: Total cost for academic year 2021/22:	Number of students fall 2021: Total cost for academic year 2021/22:
Total number of College Promise students with tuition waiver paid by CCPG (and total cost)	Number of CCPG eligible students fall 2021: Total cost for academic year 2021/22:	Number of CCPG eligible students Fall 2021: Total cost for academic year 2021/22:
Total number of College Promise students with tuition waiver paid by source other than AB 19/AB 2 or CCPG (and total cost)	Source: Number of students fall 2021: Total cost for academic year 2021/22:	Source: Number of students fall 2021: Total cost for academic year 2021/22:
What is the total cost of nontuition fees that are covered per College Promise student (and what types of fees are included)? Please indicate below if your college does not have any required nontuition fees.	Total cost of nontuition fees per student for academic year 2021/22:	Total cost of nontuition fees per student for academic year 2021/22:
Total number of College Promise students whose nontuition fees are paid by AB 19	Number of students fall 2021:	Number of students fall 2021:

Total number of College Promise students with nontuition fees paid by other sources (please indicate source and number of students per source)	Funding Source 1 and number of students fall 2021: Funding Source 2 and number of students fall 2021:	Funding Source 1 and number of students fall 2021: Funding Source 2 and number of students fall 2021:

Please complete the following table on the College Promise program nontuition/fee student financial support for the 2021/22 academic year.

- Indicate if the benefits are provided for a subset of College Promise students and what the subset is.
- *Do not* include benefits that are provided to students who are not participating in the College Promise program.

Table A3.

Nontuition/Fees Student Financial Support for College Promise Students

Type of financial support or costs for academic year 2021/22	Description of financial support	Funding source (if more than one source, indicate percentage covered by each)	Total cost per student for academic year 2021/22	Number of students in academic year 2021/22	Total expenditures in academic year 2021/22
Books and materials					
Grocery					
On-campus food					
Transportation	(please indicate type: parking permits, gas cards, etc.)				
Technology	(please indicate type: computer, Wi-Fi, etc.)				
School supplies					
Field trips					

Other (please
indicate)

Other (please
indicate)

Please complete the table of the AB 19/AB 2 expenditures outside of the formal College Promise program for the 2021/22 academic year.

Table A4.

AB 19/AB 2 Expenditures Outside of the Formal College Promise Program

Type of AB 19/AB 2 expenditures in academic year 2021/22	Description of financial support	Total cost per student in academic year 2021/22	Number of students in academic year 2021/22	Total expenditures in academic year 2021/22
Grocery and food				
Childcare				
Housing				
Textbooks				
General scholarships				
Other (please indicate)				
Other (please indicate)				

Suggested citation: Rauner, M., Mathias, J., & Lolashvili, G. (2024). *Sustainable, robust, and inclusive College Promise programs in California's community colleges: Examining the relationship between funding models and equity.* WestEd. https://californiacollegepromise.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Relationship-Between-CP-Funding-Models-and-Equity.pdf

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