

2020-21 Harris County Promise Policies

Executive Summary: *Harris County Promise is a partnership between PK-12 organizations and higher education institutions to increase college credential and degree attainment for the region.*

Through the Harris County Promise program, partner colleges provide scholarships to students who graduate from a participating high school. The Promise Scholarship covers the gap between need-based grant aid and the cost of tuition for up three years.

The Promise program is awarded to students attending a Promise partner college, regardless of GPA or income. Students need only meet the program deadlines and submit the Promise Pledge. In addition to the financial award, Promise Scholars will be guided by a success coach to help navigate college life.

The Goal of Promise:

Harris County Promise is more than a scholarship! It is a community investment designed to provide unparalleled access to higher education. The goal of Harris County Promise is to increase the number of students in our community earning a postsecondary credential by eliminating financial barriers, increasing support, and aligning resources.

Overview:

- All Texas resident students, including undocumented students who meet TASFA requirements, regardless of income or high school grade point average, who graduate in 2020-21 from a participating high school and meet the Promise deadlines, will receive sufficient funding (through a combination of state, federal, and/or institutional funds) to pay the full cost of tuition and fees, and assistance with books, for up to three consecutive academic years or degree completion, whichever comes first, at a Promise college.
- An academic year includes fall, spring and summer semesters.
- Promise funding is only available for a student's first degree; for example, a scholar may not obtain a second associate degree with Promise funds.
- Promise Scholars will be paired with and supported by a success coach.
- Promise Scholars will have access to additional transfer scholarships to attend partner four-year universities as these partnerships become finalized.

Eligibility:

2020-21 graduates are eligible to participate in the Harris County Promise program if they meet all of the following criteria.

1. Enrolled at a participating high school by the PEIMS Snapshot date of 10/30/20 and graduate from a participating high school during the 2020-21 school year.
 - a. Students graduating in December 2020 are Promise eligible; however, Promise funding does not begin until the fall semester following high school graduation.
 - b. Students must graduate between December 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021 to be eligible for Promise in Fall 2021.
2. Meet all Promise deadlines for pledge, admissions application, financial aid application, and enrollment (including the completion of all financial aid requirements).

3. Are eligible for in-district tuition and complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or Texas Application for State Financial Aid (TASFA) application.
 - a. Students who have not met Texas residency requirements must file an appeal to be considered for the Harris County Promise program.
 - b. Students classified for residency as international or out-of-country students are not eligible for Promise. Students who have questions regarding their eligibility for in-district residency status for tuition purposes should visit their college admissions office.
4. Must start classes the fall semester after their high school graduation.
 - a. Promise scholars must enroll in the fall and spring semester during their first year and must not skip a fall or spring semester during the three-year eligibility period.
 - b. Promise scholars may enroll in fall, spring, or summer terms after enrolling in their initial fall semester.
 - c. "Stop Out" rule is applicable. Students who enter the Promise and sit out for one long semester (fall or spring), must complete an appeal form if they fail to enroll each fall and spring semester.

Harris County Promise does not have a high school GPA or income requirement to receive the Promise Scholarship, however students must meet Financial Aid Satisfactory Academic Progress each year and maintain a 2.0 GPA each semester beginning in the 2nd semester of college enrollment as a Promise Scholar. There is no cap on the number of 2020-21 graduates who can receive the Promise Scholarship or participate in the Promise program.

High school students who do not meet Harris County Promise deadlines and choose to attend a partner college will be responsible for all tuition, fees, and costs not covered by other scholarships or financial aid.

A Promise Scholar May:

- Enroll in any college credit program (certificate or associate degree) or in approved non-credit workforce training certificate programs as long as these programs are approved by THECB and qualify for reimbursement by the state.
- Continue on and earn an associate degree after completing a workforce training or certificate program.
- Receive other scholarship funds (contact financial aid office for further details).
- Use Promise dollars toward the completion of developmental classes.

A Promise Scholar Must:

- Accept all gift aid for which they are eligible, including Pell and state grants.
- Only use Promise dollars towards a first degree. Students who graduate with an associate degree from high school may not use Promise dollars to complete an additional associate degree or workforce training certificate.
- Complete their financial aid file, including verification, before the Promise enrollment deadline in year one, and before fall classes begin in years two and three.
- Check in with their success coach, at minimum, once per semester. Check in must be acknowledged by a Promise success coach as being completed satisfactorily.

Note: Dual credit students can participate in the Harris County Promise program after high school graduation to complete the balance of hours needed for an associate degree up to degree completion.

A Promise Scholar May Not:

- Use Promise dollars toward non-credit continuing education courses that are not part of a state-approved credential or do not fill a demand occupation in the local market.
- Use the Promise award towards more than one CE program.
- Use the award at another non-Promise college/university.
- Receive Promise funding for concurrent enrollment at more than one college.
- Transfer the award to another individual.
- Receive a refund of any unspent Promise dollars.
- Enter the Promise program during the summer prior to the scholar's first semester in the program.

Immediate Ineligibility Criteria

Should a student fail to adhere to any/all policies, Harris County Promise invokes the right to remove a student's eligibility. It is the scholar's responsibility to keep contact information up to date with Harris County Promise and the awarding institution's registrar office. Incorrect contact information does not prevent a student from becoming ineligible.

A Promise Scholar will become immediately ineligible for his/her award if the scholar:

1. Does not comply with the college Financial Aid Satisfactory Academic Progress Policy.
2. Does not earn a 2.0 GPA each semester beginning in semester two of the program.
3. Does not register for fall or spring semesters at a minimum of 12 credit hours or declare a CE program during the three years in the Promise program.
4. Does not re-apply for the next academic year's FAFSA/TASFA before fall classes begin.
5. Is suspended or expelled by the campus for violating student codes of conduct.
6. Uses Promise funds upon return to a partner college after attending another institution.
7. Receives Promise funding for concurrent enrollment in a partner college and another institution.
8. Stops out for a fall or spring semester and his/her "Stop Out" Appeal is not approved.
9. Knowingly falsifies or enters major discrepancies of any information on their Pledge, application, or FAFSA/TASFA application.

Eligibility for the Harris County Promise program is consistent with the same eligibility requirements with respect to a student's criminal record as those in the federal Title IV programs that includes the Federal Pell Grant program.

Promise Reinstatement Policy

If a student is suspended from or becomes ineligible to receive the Promise Scholarship because of qualifying special circumstances (i.e. military, pregnancy, documented illness, etc.), the student may appeal to their respective college with information on the mitigating circumstances that resulted in his or her loss of eligibility. The appeal must include supporting documentation regarding the circumstances. The students will be notified by the college within five business days after a decision has been made regarding appeal.

Application

To receive the Harris County Promise, 2021 graduates must meet four key deadlines:

- **February 5:** Complete the Harris County Promise Pledge at www.harriscountypromise.org.
- **March 5:** Complete partner college admissions application.
- **April 9:** Submit FAFSA or TASFA with a partner college listed.
- **July 16:** Complete all enrollment steps, including financial aid verification and acceptance of aid, and register for fall classes.

Seniors in a Promise high school must complete the Promise Pledge by February 5 to be eligible for Promise. Students who miss any of the deadlines are not eligible to participate.

Payments and Renewal

Promise scholars will never directly receive funds from Harris County Promise. After a Promise Scholar's eligible state and federal grant or gift financial aid have been transmitted, the partner college will fund any remaining balance of tuition and fees with funds designated for Promise scholarships. Scholarship recipients will receive a books stipend via the campus bookstore.

To receive their initial financial aid award from the college, Promise Scholars must complete the following:

1. Promise Scholars must register for classes on or before July 16, 2021 to remain eligible for the Promise program and remain fully enrolled through the census date.
2. Promise Scholars must identify and declare a program of study (major or career path) before the first academic semester of the scholar's initial enrollment in Promise.
3. Promise scholars must complete pre-advising before registration begins to select courses that apply toward the scholar's degree and/or certificate plan.

To maintain eligibility to renew the Promise award, scholars must complete the following:

1. Enroll in a minimum of 12 credit hours per fall or spring semester.
 - a. Promise Scholars must enroll in a credit or CE Program leading to a credit degree or certificate. These programs must be classified as "reimbursable" by the State of Texas.
 - b. Scholars may not receive Promise funding for more than 36 credit hours per academic year (fall, spring, and summer semesters).
 - c. Scholars must meet Financial Aid Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) policy in order to remain in the program.
 - d. Scholars must maintain a 2.0 GPA each semester of the program beginning the second semester of enrollment.
 - e. Scholars may enroll in fewer than 12 credit hours during the final semester if fewer than 12 credit hours are required for degree completion.
 - f. Note: students may enroll in fewer than 12 credit hours if they are enrolled in the maximum allowed (for example, some programs limit students to 11 credit hours).
2. Renew their FAFSA/TASFA each year before fall classes begin.
3. Check in with their success coach, at minimum, once per semester. Check in must be acknowledged by a Promise success coach as being completed satisfactorily.

Additional Considerations

- Correct Contact Information. The student is responsible for notifying Harris County Promise and their college when his/her contact information changes by emailing students@harriscountypromise.org (for current high school students) or scholars@harriscountypromise.org (for Promise Scholars). (Include full name and student ID). Incorrect information does not prevent a student from becoming ineligible. Once a student is enrolled, correct information must be on file with the student's success coach.
- Determining Program Eligibility: Only designated partner college staff may determine a student's eligibility.
- Policy Changes: Policies may be subject to change without notice. It is a student's responsibility to refer to the policies as posted at harriscountypromise.org for updates and changes to the Promise program.