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The Kalamazoo Promise "Sweet 16," Summary Study Results: 16 Key Findings from 16 Years Studying The Kalamazoo Promise

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The Kalamazoo Promise

“Sweet 16”

SUMMARY
STUDY
RESULTS

**16 Key Findings from
16 Years Studying
The Kalamazoo Promise**



May 2022

W.E. UPJOHN
INSTITUTE
FOR EMPLOYMENT RESEARCH

Acknowledgments

The authors of this report are Kathleen Bolter and Isabel McMullen.

Additional Upjohn Institute contributors are Lee Adams, Tim Bartik, Dan Collier, Brad Hershbein, Allison Hewitt Colosky, Marta Lachowska, Michelle Miller-Adams, and Bridget Timmeney.

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16 years ago...

The Kalamazoo Promise went into effect guaranteeing full college scholarships to eligible graduates of the Kalamazoo Public Schools (KPS) district. The Kalamazoo Promise provided the model for a unique type of college scholarship program, one in which the allocation of funds is based not on merit or need, but on place—specifically, Kalamazoo, a medium-sized midwestern city located halfway between Chicago and Detroit.

The Kalamazoo Promise is perhaps one of the best designed “place-based” scholarship programs in the country. The scholarship is generously awarded before other funding is considered. This means students are able to access financial aid in addition to their Kalamazoo Promise funding. The scholarship is flexible, allowing recipients to access funds any time within 10 years of graduation. The scholarship is universal: every graduate of KPS is eligible for a Promise scholarship provided they have been enrolled in and resided within the district for a minimum of four years, with the amount of the scholarship increasing based on enrollment length. And the Kalamazoo Promise is endowed in perpetuity, meaning it exists as a long-term commitment to the community.

The Kalamazoo Promise was designed with the potential to shift the community away from the tipping point of urban decay by spurring scholastic achievement, school improvement, population growth, and economic revitalization. Calling into action coalitions of residents, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies to work strategically to leverage the potential of the Kalamazoo Promise, the goal was for this place-based scholarship program to serve as an important new instrument for economic revitalization.

Source: Miller-Adams, Michelle. “A simple gift? The impact of the Kalamazoo Promise on economic revitalization.” *Employment Research Newsletter* 13, no. 3 (2006): 1.



Today in 2022 . . .

The Kalamazoo Promise has been in effect for over 16 years, with close to 10,000 KPS students using the scholarship. From its inception, the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research has served as a partner to the Kalamazoo Promise, particularly in the area of research and evaluation. Serving as a hub for research efforts and a convener of those seeking to strengthen the connection between education and economic development, the Upjohn Institute has studied many facets of the Kalamazoo Promise from college enrollment and completion, the job market, debt burden for students, and community impact. This booklet provides a summary of some of the most important takeaways from that research to date.

The goals of the Kalamazoo Promise were immense and daring; to lower the cost of postsecondary education and increase incentives for high school graduation, college attendance, and college completion. In doing so, stakeholders anticipated higher lifetime earnings for the community's young people and a better-trained workforce for businesses. By creating incentives for current residents to remain in the district and for new residents (especially those with children) to move in, the Promise was also expected to reverse the school district's decades-long slide in enrollment.

While additional research is still needed, the studies that were completed show the significant impact of the Kalamazoo Promise on the lives of the residents of the Kalamazoo community. The Kalamazoo Promise has succeeded in many ways, although time is still needed to understand the full impact of the scholarship. In honor of the Kalamazoo Promise's "sweet 16," we present 16 key findings from 16 years studying the Kalamazoo Promise.





The Kalamazoo Promise increases the likelihood students enroll in college.



Increase in the chance of students enrolling in *any college* within six months of high school graduation.



Increase in the chance of students enrolling in a *four-year college* within six months of high school graduation.

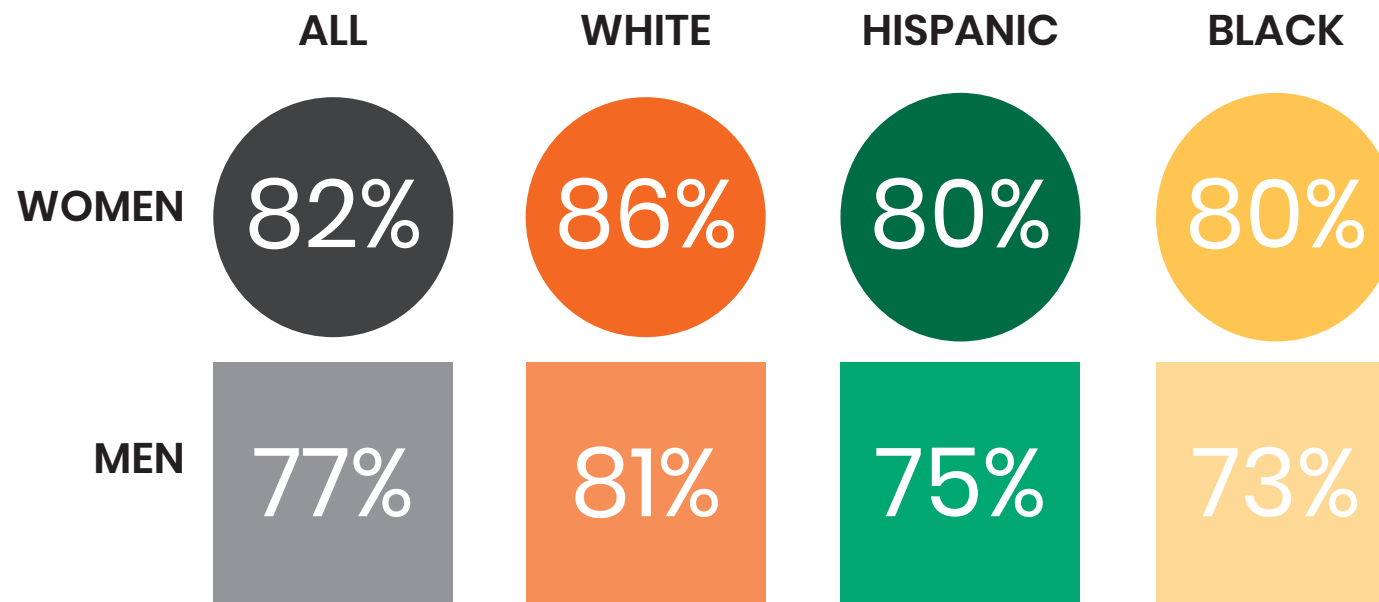
Source: Bartik, Timothy J., Brad Hershbein, and Marta Lachowska. "The effects of the Kalamazoo Promise Scholarship on college enrollment and completion." *Journal of Human Resources* 56, no. 1 (2021): 269–310.



2

Among all racial and ethnic groups, women eligible for the Kalamazoo Promise are more likely to enroll in college than men.

Percent of Eligible Graduates Attending College at Any Time



Sources: Bartik, Timothy J., Brad Hershbein, and Marta Lachowska. “The effects of the Kalamazoo Promise Scholarship on college enrollment and completion.” *Journal of Human Resources* 56, no. 1 (2021): 269–310.; W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, Kalamazoo Promise Eligibility and Usage data. “Scholarship Use by Race/Ethnicity and Gender: Percent of Eligible Graduates who used the Promise at any time.” (2022).

3

Nearly two in three Kalamazoo Promise scholars enroll at a local college in Kalamazoo.



Western Michigan University

Percent of Promise Scholars Enrolled Fall 2021

31%



Kalamazoo Valley Community College

27%



Kalamazoo College

7%

Source: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, Kalamazoo Promise Eligibility and Usage data. "Enrollment of Kalamazoo Promise Recipients at local institutions." (2022).

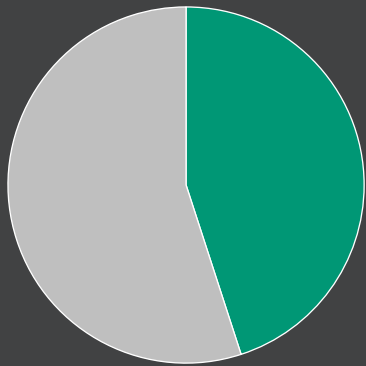


4

Kalamazoo Promise Scholars are three times as likely to give college another try if they take a break after their first year.

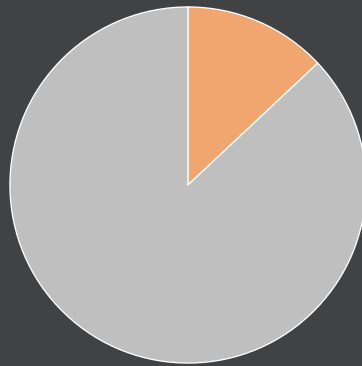
Reenrollment Rates of Students Who Left School Early

45%



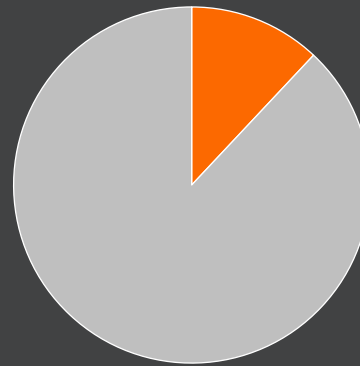
Kalamazoo Promise Scholars

13%



Students Nationwide

12%



Students in Michigan

Source: Collier, Daniel A., and Isabel McMullen. "Sometimes a Long and Winding Road: An Exploration of Kalamazoo Promise Stop Out and Reenrollment." *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* (2020): 1521025120958631.



The Kalamazoo Promise increases the percentage of students earning any post-secondary credential.

28%

Increase in likelihood of students earning *any credential* within six years of high school graduation.

1 in 3

Eligible scholars have earned a certificate, associate's degree, or bachelor's degree within six years of enrolling in their program.

Sources: Bartik, Timothy J., Brad Hershbein, and Marta Lachowska. "The Effects of the Kalamazoo Promise Scholarship on College Enrollment, Persistence, and Completion." *Upjohn Institute Working Paper* 15-229. Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research (2017); W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, Kalamazoo Promise Eligibility and Usage data. "Summary of Promise Eligible Graduates' Higher Education Credentials to Date." (2022).





More students are earning bachelor's degrees because of the Kalamazoo Promise.

↑ 25%

Increase in the likelihood of students earning a *bachelor's degree* within six years of high school graduation.

8 in 10

Credentials earned by Kalamazoo Promise Scholars are bachelor's degrees.

Sources: Bartik, Timothy J., Brad Hershbein, and Marta Lachowska. "The Effects of the Kalamazoo Promise Scholarship on College Enrollment, Persistence, and Completion." *Upjohn Institute Working Paper* 15-229. Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research (2017); W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, Kalamazoo Promise Eligibility and Usage data. "Summary of Promise Eligible Graduates' Higher Education Credentials to Date." (2022).

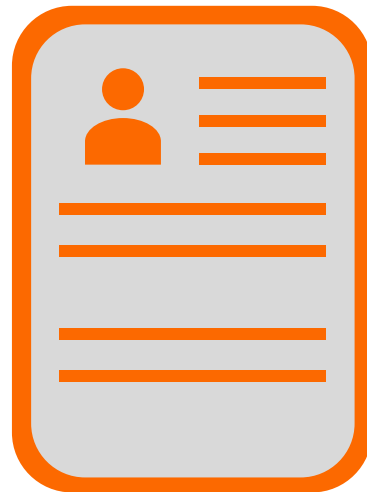




Since the Kalamazoo Promise, students report greater involvement in extracurricular learning activities, including internships, research projects, community service learning, and study abroad.

Graduates of Kalamazoo Public Schools Involved in College Activities

Before the
Kalamazoo Promise



47%

After the
Kalamazoo Promise



55%

Source: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. "Kalamazoo Promise Alumni Survey." (2021).





About a decade after high school graduation, the Kalamazoo Promise boosts average earnings for scholars by about 6 percent.

Average Earnings of Graduates of Kalamazoo Public Schools in Michigan*

Ineligible for
the Kalamazoo Promise

Eligible for
the Kalamazoo Promise



* Earnings are for graduates working within Michigan.

Source: McMullen, Isabel and Brad J. Hershbein. "Beyond Degrees: The Kalamazoo Promise and Workforce Outcomes." *Employment Research* (2021): 28(3): 1-4..

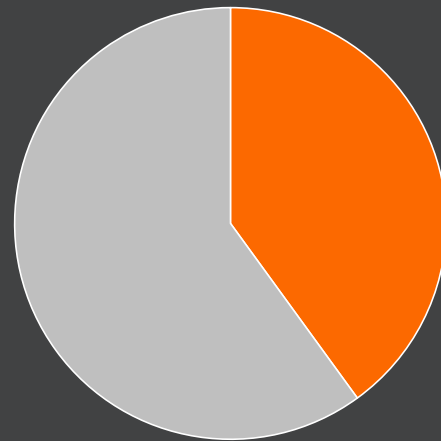


9

Despite coming from a lower-income school district, two in five Kalamazoo Promise Scholars report not having to borrow any money to attend college.

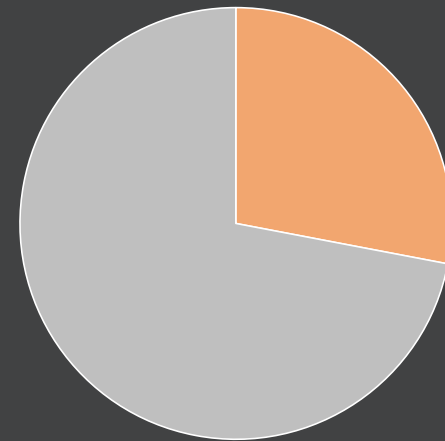
Percent of Students Earning a Bachelor's Degree Reporting Borrowing No Money to Attend College

40%



Kalamazoo Promise Scholars

28%



Students Nationwide

Source: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. "Kalamazoo Promise Alumni Survey." (2021); Cominole, Melissa, Erin Thomsen, and Miha Henderson. "Baccalaureate and Beyond (B&B: 08/18): first look at the 2018 employment and educational experiences of 2007-08 college graduates." (2021).



10

Graduates of Kalamazoo Public Schools with student loan debt are less likely to report large amounts in their 20s and 30s.

Graduates of Kalamazoo Public Schools Reporting Student Loan Debt of \$50,000 or more*



*Includes both undergraduate and graduate school debt. Numbers not adjusted for inflation.

Source: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. "Kalamazoo Promise Alumni Survey." (2021).

11

Black graduates of Kalamazoo Public Schools report having significantly less debt than Black graduates before the Kalamazoo Promise.

Change in Median Reported Debt

	PRE-PROMISE	POST-PROMISE	DIFFERENCE
EVERYONE	\$45K	\$23K	↓ \$22K
WHITE	\$45K	\$23K	↓ \$22K
BLACK	\$88K	\$45K	↓ \$43K

*Includes both undergraduate and graduate school debt. Numbers not adjusted for inflation.

Source: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. "Kalamazoo Promise Alumni Survey." (2021).



12

Since the Kalamazoo Promise, more graduates of Kalamazoo Public Schools report staying in the community.

Percent of Graduates of Kalamazoo Public Schools Living Near the Kalamazoo City Center

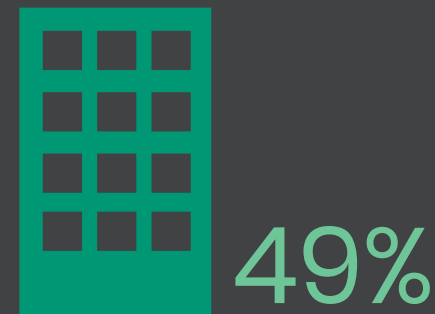
Before the Kalamazoo Promise



Living Less than 5 Miles from City Center



After the Kalamazoo Promise



Living Less than 5 Miles from City Center

Source: McMullen, Isabel and Brad J. Hershbein. "Beyond Degrees: The Kalamazoo Promise and Workforce Outcomes." *Employment Research* (2021): 28(3): 1-4.

13

Graduates of Kalamazoo Public Schools report they are more likely to own their own home later in life.

Graduates of Kalamazoo Public Schools Reporting Home Ownership

Before the Kalamazoo Promise



1 in 5

After the Kalamazoo Promise



2 in 5

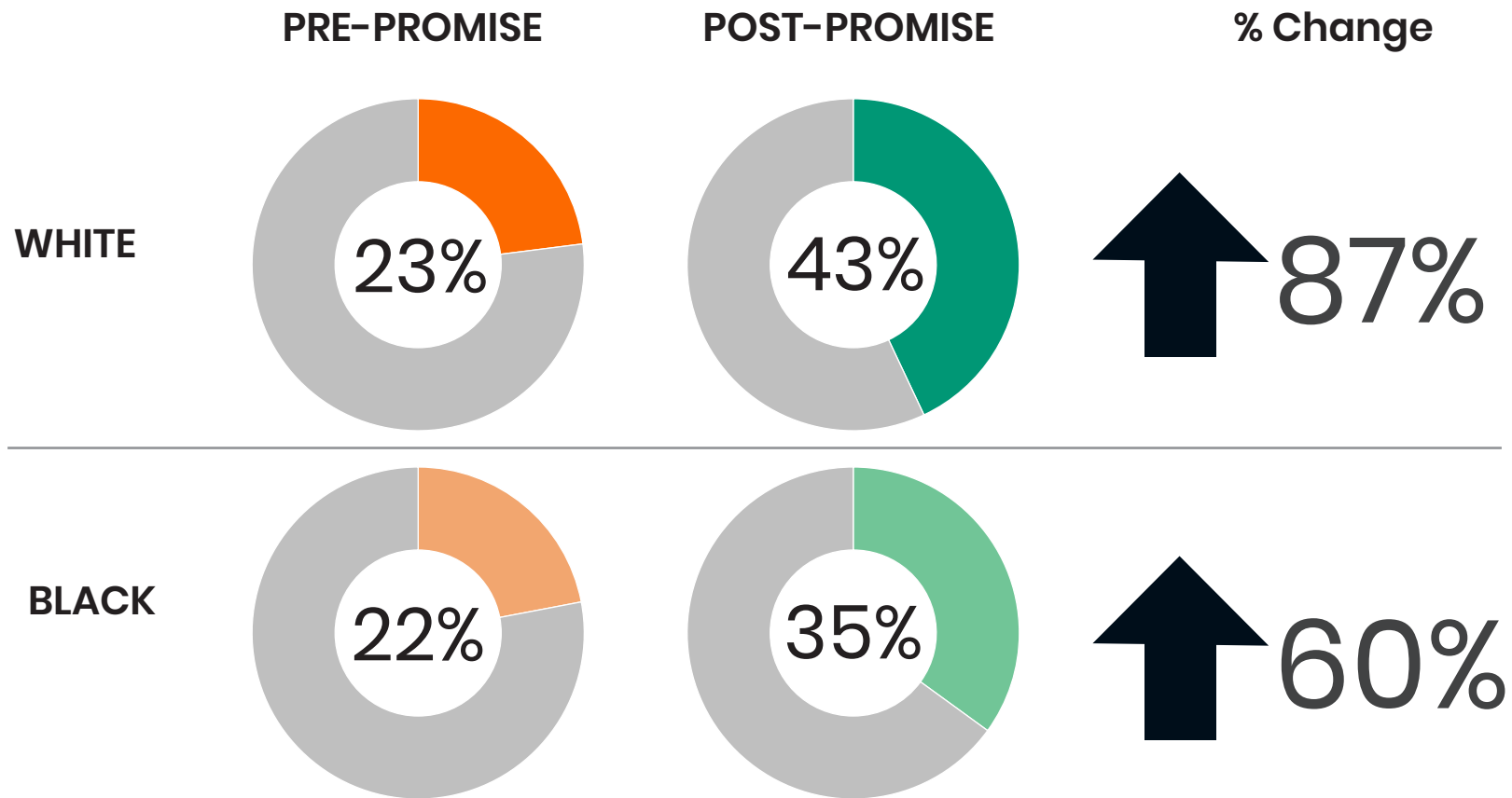
Source: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. "Kalamazoo Promise Alumni Survey." (2021).



14

Both Black and White graduates of Kalamazoo Public Schools report higher levels of home ownership compared to pre-Promise graduates.

Home Ownership Rate

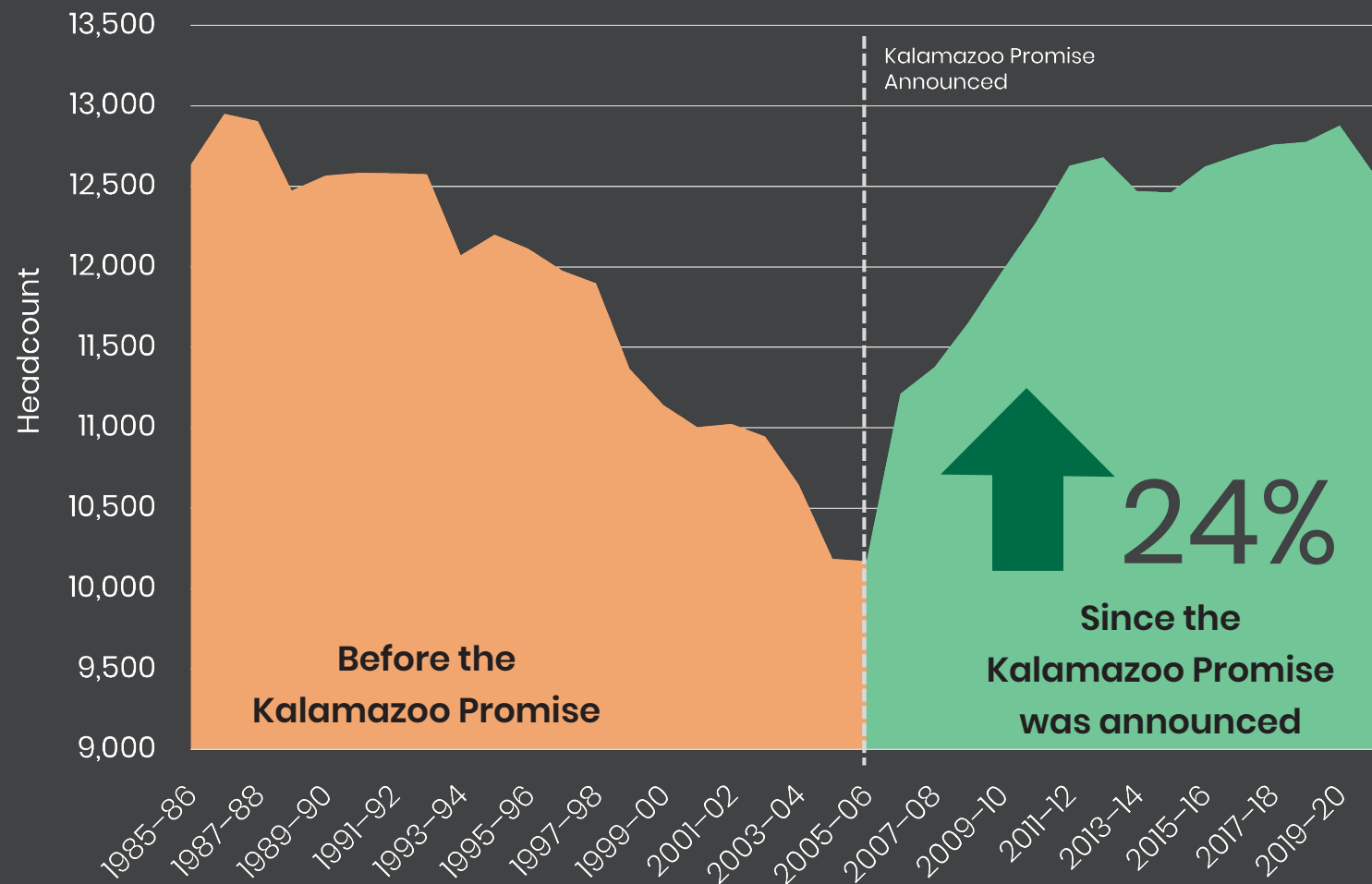


Source: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. "Kalamazoo Promise Alumni Survey." (2021).

15

Enrollment in Kalamazoo Public Schools has increased almost every year since the Kalamazoo Promise was announced.

Enrollment in Kalamazoo Public Schools



Source: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. Kalamazoo Promise Eligibility and Usage data. "Kalamazoo Public Schools Enrollment Trend." (2022).



16

More families are staying in the Kalamazoo Public School District since the Kalamazoo Promise.

Retained Students in Kalamazoo Public Schools



Each year, **more than 250 students** and their families are staying in Kalamazoo Public Schools who would likely have left the area without the Kalamazoo Promise.

Hershbein, Brad J. "A Second Look at Enrollment Changes after the Kalamazoo Promise." *Upjohn Institute Working Paper 13-200*. Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. (2013).

In Conclusion...

The Kalamazoo Promise will continue to impact the lives of people in Kalamazoo and the larger community for many years to come. Nationally, the cost of university attendance continues to rise, putting the prospect of a college education out of reach for many people. The COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated many of the factors that contribute to unequal educational access and success. The research summarized here underscores that Kalamazoo grapples with many of these same trends, but that universal and accessible resources result in important positive effects on individuals and communities.

There is still much research to do and avenues to explore in understanding the impact of this innovative scholarship program. As more cohorts graduate from the Kalamazoo Public School district, more and more data becomes available to analyze the long-term effects of the scholarship program. As more scholars plant roots in Kalamazoo, develop their careers, and begin families of their own, we also will begin to see the second-generation effects of the Promise. The Kalamazoo Promise continues to hone its student services and develop community partnerships aimed at addressing structural inequities within the community. The scope of the scholarship itself continues to expand to include internship opportunities, increased apprenticeship opportunities, and other paths to living-wage jobs and greater prosperity. All of this growth suggests that the Promise will continue to serve a central role in the community, and the details of these changes will open individual opportunity and many new avenues for exploration and study.



About

The Kalamazoo Promise

The first of its kind, The Kalamazoo Promise began in Kalamazoo, Michigan in 2005 among a group of anonymous donors who recognized the hurdle that college tuition poses in determining the futures of young people.

Without the looming cost of tuition, they asked, what could our children accomplish in the future?

From this simple question came an unprecedented movement—The Kalamazoo Promise. Promised in perpetuity.

<https://www.kalamazoopromise.com/>



The W.E. Upjohn Institute

The W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research is a private, not-for-profit, nonpartisan, independent research organization that has studied policy-related issues of employment and unemployment since its founding in 1945. The Institute is headquartered in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Institute research focuses on labor markets, addressing several core areas: the causes of unemployment and the effectiveness of social safety net programs in mitigating its effects; education and training systems to improve workers' employability and earnings; and the influence of state and local economic development policies on local labor markets. The Institute also assesses emerging trends affecting workers and labor markets in its core research areas.

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