

El Dorado Promise Impacts Test Scores

January 20, 2013

Six years after the El Dorado Promise scholarship program was introduced to the students of the El Dorado, Arkansas School District, the program's impact on student success continues to impress. According to the latest El Dorado Promise report released today, an independent study conducted by the Office of Education Policy at the University of Arkansas (UA-OEP) found that El Dorado Jr. High students' test scores were higher than those of similar students in other south Arkansas school districts.

On January 22, 2007, residents of El Dorado, Arkansas learned that a unique initiative called The El Dorado Promise would allow graduates of El Dorado Public Schools the opportunity to earn college degrees tuition-free as a result of a \$50 million commitment by Murphy Oil Corporation to El Dorado's greatest resource – its children. Since its inception, 1,239 students have received Promise scholarship funding.

Although much of the focus has been on how the El Dorado Promise affects students in high school and after graduation, the UA-OEP evaluated the impact that the Promise has on students even earlier by comparing El Dorado students' Benchmark test scores to those of students from other similar school districts in south Arkansas. The study found that El Dorado's 7th and 8th grade test scores are higher than those of comparison students in both math and literacy.

“We follow four cohorts of El Dorado students – students who were in 3rd-6th grade in the 2005-06 school year, until their 8th grade year,” said Dr. Gary Ritter, Endowed Chair with UA-OEP. “El Dorado students were matched with identical students, based on test scores, income level, etcetera, from similar school districts in south Arkansas.”

The Promise had begun for all four cohorts by 7th grade at the latest. By 7th and 8th grade, El Dorado students scored significantly better than their matched peers in both math and literacy.

“We observed the largest effects of the Promise by 8th grade on the youngest students we studied, those who were in the 3rd grade in 2005-06,” said Jennifer Ash, a Research Associate with UA-OEP.

“The Promise helped to foster a ‘college-going’ culture throughout the school district, motivating students to work harder and energizing our schools to provide the best possible education to our students,” said Sylvia Thompson, El Dorado Promise Director. “This study shows that the impact of the Promise is measurable.”

In other information released in the latest El Dorado Promise report, over 90 percent of the Promise-eligible high school class of 2012 enrolled in college in the fall of 2012. Additionally, 91 percent of all Promise college freshmen are completing at least one year of college. Of the first class of Promise students, the 2007 EHS graduates, 27 percent graduated from college in five years or less. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education's latest figures, Arkansas had a 19.7 percent four-year graduation rate and a 38.7 percent six-year graduation rate.

Former President Bill Clinton congratulated the El Dorado High School senior class in April during an annual Academic Signing Day celebration. “I wanted to come here because as nearly as I can tell, there is no community in the U.S. where a company like Murphy Oil has made this big a commitment,” Clinton said as he addressed more than 300 graduating seniors.

“This scholarship is giving you a chance to do what you want to do. Most people in the world don’t have a choice about how they will feed themselves and their families. The El Dorado Promise is a huge deal – education is important to our country,” he said.

The El Dorado Promise scholarship reaches beyond the boundaries of economic need and academic ability to pay up to 100% of college tuition and mandatory fees for all students who graduate from El Dorado High School, reside in the district, and have been an

El Dorado Public School student since at least the ninth grade. El Dorado Promise students can attend any accredited two or four-year college or university in the U. S. The maximum amount of the Promise scholarship is based on the maximum resident tuition payable at an Arkansas public university. In 2012-2013, the highest tuition rate in the state was \$7,332 for a student taking 30 credit hours per year.

For more detailed information on the latest analysis of the El Dorado Promise impact, see the 2013 Impact Report on www.eldoradopromise.com.
