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## News Release

# **The Pittsburgh Promise Reinstates Scholarship Payments for Room, Board, and Books**

## **Structural Changes Broaden Access to Promise Awards**

PITTSBURGH, January 29, 2018— The Pittsburgh Promise continues to assess and modify its “last dollar” scholarship in order to make post-secondary education more accessible and affordable to Pittsburgh’s students. To ensure equitable access to scholarships, the Board of Directors of The Pittsburgh Promise has approved the following changes to the scholarship award starting with the Class of 2018:

- Add room, board, and books back to the scholarship equation;
- Restore the \$1,000 minimum scholarship for those whose total cost of attendance is covered by other grants and scholarships;
- Remove the sliding scale of residency and enrollment in PPS and reduce the annual maximum award to \$5,000. Meaning that, every student who starts on day one of 9<sup>th</sup> grade and meets eligibility criteria will be eligible for up to \$5,000.

The Promise reports that modelling these structural changes on student data results in a 14% increase to average individual annual scholarships. The changes will also increase The Pittsburgh Promise’s annual scholarship expenses by approximately \$400,000 per class per year, as more students will use their maximum award amount. The Promise remains committed to its goal of raising the required resources to fund students through the Class of 2028. The Promise will also remain a “last dollar” scholarship, meaning that the scholarship is added to a student’s financial aid package after all other grants have been applied, but before loans.

Executive Director Saleem Ghubril commented, “The Promise has been based on a sliding scale model that was hard for our students and families to understand. The model also resulted in the majority of students not receiving the maximum award. For example, while our maximum award for the Class of 2017 was \$7,500, only 39% of students qualified for that maximum. Now, a \$5,000 maximum award will be provided to every eligible student. By shifting these program parameters, we can optimize how our scholarship is being used. Broadening access to available funds allows average awards to increase without threatening our sustainability.”

## Adjusting to Meet the Needs of Students

The reinstatement of the \$1,000 minimum and addition of scholarship awards for room, board, and books are the result of an evaluation of The Promise's Class of 2017 scholarship structure as well as a response to numerous research reports. A recent report by the University of Pittsburgh's Learning Research and Development Center—*The Promise of Place-Based Investment in College Access and Success: Investigating the Impact of The Pittsburgh Promise*—affirms the importance of room and board support for low-income students and the positive impacts of Promise scholarships.

In June 2015, The Promise announced changes to the scholarship to ensure sustainability and to cover, at minimum, the Class of 2028. Those changes took effect during the fall of 2017. After reviewing the data for the fall semester, The Promise determined that its criteria, particularly the removal of room, board, and books from its funding equation, disproportionately impacted the lowest income students. The Promise found that low-income students were often unable to overcome the barriers to accessing additional grants, or even loans, for the required room and board funds. The Promise took immediate action for the Class of 2017 by gathering a group of donors to create a one-time fund to allow their scholarships to include room, board, and books.

“The data for the fall semester made it clear that funds for room and board and books are essential to providing our students with equitable post-secondary access and ensuring their long-term success. Safeguarding that equity is key to our mission,” Ghubril said.

The Promise reports that the changes will result in an increase in the share of the scholarships distributed to the lowest income students from 46% in 2017 to 58% in 2018, which will more closely match the income demographics within Pittsburgh Public Schools.

## Upcoming Community Outreach

The Promise team will communicate with Pittsburgh Public Schools staff, students and families, and community partners in the coming weeks. This outreach plan includes helping future Promise students, and those who support them, understand the nuances of post-secondary costs and how The Promise scholarship fits into total financial aid packages.

## About The Pittsburgh Promise

The Pittsburgh Promise, a scholarship program for Pittsburgh Public School students, advocates for improving the quality of education and increasing the preparedness and diversity of the region's workforce. Pittsburgh has the largest Promise program in the United States. For more information about The Pittsburgh Promise, visit [www.pittsburghpromise.org](http://www.pittsburghpromise.org).

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