



Research Report No. 08-4

Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

OPPORTUNITY GRANTS

A Progress Report on the Post Secondary Opportunity Program

October 2008

Background

Globalization and technological change are creating increasing demands for higher and differently skilled workers than in the past. Improving the labor market competitiveness of Washingtonians requires that they all have access to post-secondary education. Community and technical colleges are the major gateway for under-skilled and under-educated workers to increase educational attainment and skills levels via certificate, degree and apprenticeship training programs.

In 2006, the Washington State Legislature appropriated \$4 million to the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) to create the Opportunity Grant pilot program. Colleges started 10 pilot programs for 843 Opportunity students. These pilots showed promising progress with 73 percent fall to spring college retention.

In 2007, the Legislature expanded the Opportunity Grant program by \$7.5 million for a total of \$11.5 million per year. In 2007-08 the Opportunity Grant program was expected to serve 2,000 full-time equivalent students (FTES) or approximately 3,000 full-time and part-time students.

The goal of the Opportunity Grants is to help low-income adults to complete at least 45 credits and earn a credential in an educational program leading to careers in high-demand fields. Opportunity Grants support and encourage students to pursue and persist on pathways that can lead them to higher attainment. In this way, they contribute to a larger policy goal to increase educational attainment for Washingtonians to the “tipping point” and beyond.

Under this new program, eligible students pursuing approved programs leading to career-path employment can receive funds to cover tuition and mandatory fees for up to 45 credits, and up to \$1,000 for books and supplies per academic year. Individualized student support services are an important part of the program and may include personalized counseling, one-on-one tutoring, career advising, college success classes, emergency child care, and emergency transportation.



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The purpose of this paper is to report on the first year (2007-08) implementation of the Opportunity Program. Throughout the report, Opportunity students are compared to two other groups of students selected from the same high demand programs. These include Pell students who did not receive Opportunity Grants and another group of largely unaided low socioeconomic status (SES) students who also did not receive Opportunity Grants. The following questions are examined.

- Who received Opportunity Grants?
- How much grant aid did Opportunity students receive and how was this aid packaged with other financial aid?
- In what high-demand programs did colleges enroll Opportunity students?
- What are the early results of the Opportunity Grant Program in terms of student progress and achievement?

Early findings on these questions are summarized below, along with preliminary conclusions and next steps.

Early Findings from the Opportunity Grant Program 2007-08

- The 34 colleges awarded Opportunity Grants to 3,871 students in 2007-08. Opportunity students generated 2,144 FTEs. The Opportunity program surpassed targets for 3,000 students and 2,000 FTEs.
- Colleges awarded Opportunity Grants to students for training in some 130 high-demand occupational fields. The predominant training field was for jobs and careers in healthcare. Registered nursing had the highest student enrollment. Programs in business administration and management were the next highest training fields for Opportunity students.
- Opportunity students' average age was 32 years. Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) were parents. Forty-three (43) percent were people of color. Median income for independent Opportunity students 24 and older was \$13,726. For dependent students under 24, the median family income of their parents was \$23,585. Students at these income levels have financial need that amounts to nearly the full cost of college. The unmet need, that portion of the cost of attending college that could not be met by the students' resources, amounted for them and their families to more than 94 percent of the cost of college.
- The majority (64 percent of independent and 55 percent of dependent) of Opportunity students were also awarded Pell and other grants. These students were compared to students from the same programs who received Pell, but not Opportunity Grants. Opportunity students received over \$900 total grant aid per quarter more in aid than the non-Opportunity Grant Pell students received. This additional aid lowered the financial need for independent Opportunity students by 11 percent more than the Pell only aid packages. Financial need was lowered by an additional 16 percent in the case of dependent Opportunity students compared to the Pell only counterpart students.
- About one third (36 percent) of independent and 45 percent of dependent Opportunity students received primarily just an Opportunity Grant. These students had far less of their financial needs met than Opportunity students with Pell. They are compared in this

report to a largely unaided group of low socioeconomic status (SES) students in the same programs.

- Students who started in the fall were measured for spring retention and/or completion at the “tipping point” and beyond. Eighty-one (81) percent of Opportunity students who enrolled in fall 2007 were still enrolled in the spring or left having reached the completion threshold. This surpassed the pilot year retention and/or completion rate of 73 percent. It also surpassed the overall rates for the two comparison groups of Pell (73 percent) and low SES students (54 percent) who were enrolled in the same high demand programs in 2007-08.
- Opportunity students had higher retention/completion rates than their comparison counterparts after taking into account type of aid packages, dependent or independent status and whether or not the student started the year full or part-time.
- As one example for students who started part-time in the fall, independent Opportunity students who received an Opportunity Grant with a Pell Grant had an 84 percent spring retention/completion rate. This compared to 65 percent for part-time Pell only students. Similarly, the rates for part-time Opportunity only and low SES students were 71 percent and 42 percent respectively. These differences for part-time students were particularly notable.
- Retention/completion rates were generally stronger for Opportunity students than for comparison groups within training programs. However, some short-term training programs that were not built to be substantial steps toward the “tipping point” had lower retention rates than those programs that were because by design program completion points fell short of the “tipping point” and therefore did not meet the retention measure threshold that was used in this analysis.
- In 2006-07, the State Board started a new initiative to measure student achievement as part of an incentive system for colleges to get more students to the “tipping point” and beyond. The system is based primarily upon milestones within the first year of college and measures success in terms of achievement points and movement toward the “tipping point” and beyond. As was displayed in better retention rates for Opportunity Grant recipients, the overall achievement rates were also higher for Opportunity students than for the comparison groups of students.
- Employment outcomes for students who left college training in June 2008 will be measured and reported in fall 2009.

Preliminary Conclusions and Next Steps

In 2007-08 colleges launched the Opportunity Grant program by awarding grants to 3,871 students. The early progress of the program was examined for student retention and achievement for different aid packages, students’ (independent/dependent) financial aid status, (full/part-time) starting enrollment, and their prior college-level work. The evidence collected to date indicates that Opportunity students were retained and increased their educational achievement at higher rates than comparable students with traditional Pell grants and other low SES students not receiving Opportunity Grants.

The Opportunity Grant legislation requires the State Board to measure student progress in the Opportunity Grant Program. In 2007, SBCTC launched the Student Achievement Initiative aimed at measuring student progress for the important incremental gains students make that lead to college success increasing academic achievement. The goal is to help more students reach the “tipping point” and beyond. These measures are called *achievement points*. Reaching achievement points is associated with higher rates of progression toward the “tipping point”. The points are in four categories: improving preparation for college-level courses, building towards a year of college credit, completing college math, and completing certificates, degrees and apprenticeships. A full description of the initiative is available at: http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/e_studentachievement.aspx. Focusing students on these milestones is a substantive way to guide them to the “tipping point”.

As the program moves forward it will be important to watch how it strengthens and augments traditional financial aid programs and how it provides a new alternative for students who start with goals or program enrollments that don’t easily fit traditional aid rules and guidelines. One sign of this will be how colleges continue to develop short training programs that do not have attainment of the “tipping point” as their immediate goal. Will colleges redesign these programs for both immediate employment and as a step toward further education by keeping the achievement point milestones in mind?

The example shown in this report is that of certified nursing assistant (CNA) and how it is structured in two different ways. The first is focusing only on the skills needed for immediate employment as a CNA. The data shows that this type of program design typically falls short of the retention/completion measure that was used for Opportunity students, even if they successfully complete and receive a short training certificate. The second way of structuring the program is as a pre-requisite for further advanced training in the healthcare pathway. For the programs identified in this report that met the retention threshold, the CNA was typically a pre-requisite for nursing. These students were retained longer and increased their college-level attainment to higher levels. Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST), a program designed to move adult basic education students into college-level workforce training programs, has shown that increasing students’ college-level readiness is also a critical enhancement so that students, even if they do leave for immediate employment, are still developing the college-ready skills alongside the nursing aide certificate. This does not diminish the importance of employment, but rather reasserts how critical it is to ensure that the educational pathway aligns with a career pathway that is also being built alongside.

Achievement points can be used to gauge student progression and success for basic skills and pre-college gains, first year college credit thresholds, completion of college math and attainment at the “tipping point” and beyond. They provide a way for colleges to measure the progress of Opportunity students that can be meaningful in program design and in student advising. Colleges can ask themselves what achievement points can be reached within their programs. Advisors can work with students to help them set their goals with these achievement points in mind.

Therefore, this report recommends that each college use the 2007-08 program results as a baseline (since colleges began operating Opportunity Grant program based on the legislation

after the Student Achievement Initiative baseline year of 2006-07). The Student Initiative provides a method of measuring the continuous improvement of this initiative allowing each college to be measured against itself for improvement. The data may also be used to identify promising practices that colleges can share.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind how to use Opportunity Grants for students who do not start out in programs that conform to traditional financial aid program eligibility requirements. This includes adult basic education students who are currently excluded from the Opportunity Grant Program aside from those in an I-BEST program. However, based on I-BEST's initial results, most adult basic education students would benefit from transition programs designed with the critical skills needed for them to be successful in programs that build to a real pathway. The Opportunity Grant program allows aid only for adult basic education students in I-BEST programs. Many colleges have designed many of their adult basic education classes with these critical skills that help students to bridge more successfully into I-BEST or other workforce education programs. Removing the criteria that bars Opportunity Grant aid to students who are taking only adult basic education classes would further assist colleges in moving students who have been typically viewed as being able to succeed onto a real post-secondary pathway.

Part 1: Who received Opportunity Grants

Opportunity Grants were awarded to 3,871 students in 2007-08. This included 3,385 students who were awarded Opportunity Grants via the new program and 486 students continuing under the demonstration pilots in 2006-07.

Two other mutually exclusive groups are analyzed in this report for comparisons with Opportunity students. The students were drawn from the same programs studied by Opportunity students. None of the students in either group received an Opportunity Grant. The first comparison group is 9,493 Pell Grant students. The second group was 7,556 students who were substantially unaided and deemed to have low socioeconomic status (SES). The latter group was selected using their place of residence as a proxy for their SES level. They were presumed to be low socioeconomic status (the 4th and 5th quintiles) like their neighbors with respect to income, education and professional occupation. Based upon the socioeconomic status of their communities and neighbors, this group is primarily comprised of low skill, low-income workers with less than an associate degree education.

Opportunity students were typically a little older and more diverse than Pell or the other low-SES comparison students. In general females were more likely to receive aid, but the percentage of males was slightly higher among Opportunity than Pell students. Nearly two-thirds of Opportunity and Pell students were parents and the majority of these were single parents. This compares to about one-third of low SES students who are parents in the third group. Table 1 summarizes students' characteristics in the three groups of students:

Table 1
Characteristics of Opportunity and Other Students Enrolled In High Demand Program Areas
Eligible for Opportunity Grants

	Opportunity	Pell	Low-SES Students
2007-08			
Enrolled	3,871	9,493	7,556
African American	13%	8%	7%
Asian/Pacific Islander (including Hawaiian)	8%	6%	7%
Latino	14%	10%	13%
Native American (American Indian or Alaskan Native)	2%	2%	2%
Other, Multiracial	5%	5%	4%
White	57%	68%	67%
Single Parent with Children or Other Dependents	36%	38%	17%
Couple with Children or Other Dependents	27%	24%	28%
Without Children or Other Dependents	37%	37%	55%
Family Status Known	75%	79%	79%
Average Age	32	30	31
Under 25 years	28%	34%	40%
25 or Older	72%	66%	60%
Male	28%	21%	29%
Female	72%	79%	71%
WorkFirst	16%	16%	18%
Worker Retraining	15%	12%	13%

Part II: Income, Cost of College and Financial Aid Need: Opportunity and Pell Comparison Students

The Opportunity Grant Program legislation requires that students complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to determine federal financial aid eligibility. In 2007-08, nearly nine in every ten Opportunity students were independent students meaning their personal income and living situation was solely used to determine federal financial aid eligibility. The median income for this group was just under \$14,000 per year. About 10 percent of Opportunity students had dependent aid status, meaning their parents’ income and family circumstances were taken into account for determining financial aid need. The median income for dependent Opportunity students’ parents was \$23,600. Financial aid calculates that the cost of attending one quarter at a Washington State community or technical college was just under \$4,900 for independent students and \$3,400 for dependent students. This cost includes tuition, books and living expenses and is based upon individual circumstances. Based upon other FAFSA calculations, both independent and dependent demonstrate need for nearly the full cost of attending college.

Table 2 presents calculations for both dependent and independent students in the Opportunity Program and for their Pell counterparts. Income, cost of attendance and financial need were similar for the two groups.

**Table 2
Income, Cost of Attendance and Financial Aid Need for Opportunity Students and Comparison Pell Students Enrolled in the Same High Demand Programs 2007-08**

	Opportunity		Pell Comparison	
	Dependent	Independent	Dependent	Independent
Recipients with Status Given	383	3,078	1,516	7,992
% of Total Recipients for Whom Dependency Status Is Known	11%	89%	16%	84%
Median Income	\$23,585	\$13,726	\$24,441	\$13,950
Median Student Budget to Pay for Cost to Attend One Quarter of College	\$3,381	\$4,877	\$3,166	\$4,847
Median Student Need- One Quarter of College Attendance	\$3,093	\$4,720	\$3,057	\$4,740

How Opportunity Grants Are Packaged with Pell, State Need Grant and Other Grant

Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of dependent and three-fourths (74 percent) of independent Opportunity students received at least one other grant along with an Opportunity grant during the year. The Pell Grant was most typically coupled with an Opportunity grant when students received multiple grants. This was followed closely by the State Need Grant. Table 3 shows the percent of Opportunity and Pell comparison students who were also awarded other grants.

Table 3
Students by Types of Grant Aid Received: Opportunity and Comparison Pell Students

	Opportunity		Pell Comparison	
	Dependent	Independent	Dependent	Independent
Opportunity Recipients	100% - 383 students	100% - 3078 students	Not Received	Not Received
Pell Recipients	55%	64%	100% - 1516 students	100% - 7992 students
State Need Grant Recipients	50%	57%	80%	79%
Other Grant Aid Recipients	25%	39%	30%	46%
Multiple Grants	65%	74%	86%	88%

The typical Opportunity Grant award was about \$1,000 per quarter. If an Opportunity student received a Pell, about \$1,100 was awarded in a given quarter. Independent Opportunity students average just over \$2,000 in total grant aid each quarter they attended during the year. The total grant aid was less than the sum of each award type because the type of grants awarded could vary by student and by quarter. Independent Opportunity students receive \$300 more in combined grant aid in a given quarter compared to the Pell comparison group. Dependent Opportunity students received about \$100 more in total grant aid in a given quarter they were enrolled. Table 4 shows the typical grant awarded in a given quarter and the total grant aid averaged over all quarters the student was enrolled.

Table 4
Median Quarterly Grant Dollars Awarded

	Opportunity		Pell Comparison	
	Dependent	Independent	Dependent	Independent
Opportunity Recipients	\$985	\$1,065	N.A.	N.A.
Pell Recipients	\$1,097	\$1,153	\$1,149	\$1,087
State Need Grant Recipients	\$765	\$802	\$786	\$802
Other Grant Aid Recipients	\$250	\$337	\$217	\$263
Median Total Grant Aid per Qtr Enrolled	\$1,794	\$2,039	\$1,688	\$1,703

The total grant aid per quarter enrolled meets half (51 percent) of the quarterly financial aid need for Independent Opportunity students and nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of financial aid need for Dependent Opportunity students. Table 5 shows the median student need and median total grant aid as a percent of need met by grants for both Opportunity students and the Pell comparison students.

Table 5
Percent of Need Met by Aid in a Quarter Attended

	Opportunity		Pell Comparison	
	Dependent	Independent	Dependent	Independent
Median Student Need- One Quarter of College Attendance	\$3,381	\$4,877	\$3,166	\$4,847
Median Total Grant Aid per Qtr Enrolled	\$1,794	\$2,039	\$1,688	\$1,703
Percent of Need Met by Total Grants	63%	51%	63%	44%

Opportunity Aid Packages with and without Pell

As referenced above, nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of independent and over one half (55 percent) of Dependent Opportunity students also received a Pell that typically was awarded in addition to their Opportunity grant. This formed the basis for two basic Opportunity Grant aid packages – with and without Pell grants. The Opportunity with Pell package also typically leveraged a State Need Grant and more often also included additional grant aid. Opportunity students who did not have a Pell as part of their package were typically far less likely to receive any other additional grant aid than Opportunity students with Pell. For example, over 80 percent of independent Opportunity students who received Pell also received a Washington State Need Grant and nearly half received other grant aid as well. In comparison, 11 percent of independent Opportunity students without Pell received a State Need Grant and 22 percent received other grant aid.

A critical factor for lining up financial aid is the time of year the student first applies for aid. Seventy-three percent of Opportunity with Pell students started the year by fall quarter. This compared to 55 percent of the Opportunity only students. Year-round availability of the Pell is important to meeting the needs of community and technical college students who often start later in the year. However, there remains a sizable portion of students who did start by fall quarter and still only primarily had an Opportunity grant. To the extent this is happening, expanding support to low income non-traditional students to help them understand the financial aid process is important.

The type of total aid package Opportunity students received made substantial differences in their total grant aid and the amount of financial need that was met by this aid. When all grant aid was combined, Independent Opportunity students with a Pell received \$2,641 in total grant aid while those without a Pell received \$964, basically just an Opportunity grant. For the former group, total grant aid met 55 percent of financial need. For the latter group, it met just 24 percent. Differences in met need were even greater for Dependent Opportunity students.

In a comparison between Opportunity with Pell and the Pell-only group, the Opportunity Grant makes a substantial difference in additional grant aid. With an Opportunity Grant in addition to a Pell (and in most cases a State Need Grant as well), the total grant aid awarded to Independent Opportunity with Pell students is almost \$900 dollars higher than the Pell comparison; whereas when this comparison was made between all Opportunity and the Pell comparison the difference

was just \$300. As a result 55 percent of need was met with the Opportunity added to a Pell and other grant aid, compared to 44 percent for the Pell comparison group. Likewise, dependent Opportunity students who also leverage Pell receive \$700 more in aid than a dependent student in the Pell comparison and had 79 percent of their financial aid need met compared to 63 percent for the Pell comparison students.

Table 6 summarizes income, need, total grant aid and percent of need met by grant aid for Dependent and Independent Opportunity students based upon whether or not the Pell was part of their total aid package.

Table 6
Cost of College, Financial Need, Total Grants and Percent of Need Met by
Grants for Dependent and Independent Opportunity Students
with and without Pell as part of total Grant Aid Package

	Opportunity with Pell		Opportunity without Pell	
	Dependent	Independent	Dependent	Independent
Students	212	1,976	171	1,102
Median Student Budget to Pay for Cost to Attend One Quarter of College	\$3,272	\$4,878	\$4,740	\$4,847
Median Student Need -One Quarter of College Attendance	\$3,093	\$4,763	\$2,823	\$3,984
Median Total Grants (includes Opportunity, Pell, State Need Grant and other grants) Awarded per Qtr Enrolled	\$2,447	\$2,641	\$916	\$964
Percent of Need Met by Grant Aid	79%	55%	32%	24%

Part III: High Demand Program Areas Approved for Opportunity Students

Opportunity students were enrolled in high demand training programs. The biggest training area students received funding for was healthcare. This was followed by business related fields. In addition, to the fields shown, 100 Opportunity students were enrolled in training pre-requisite classes, or other preparation for training. A significant change in the Opportunity Grant program from the original pilot was the narrowing of allowable pre-requisites. Preparation for training is a large area that is of important interest as the new Opportunity Program specifies the Opportunity grant is for up to 45 credits or 3 years including pre-requisites. Often times low skill adult workers are far from college ready and support for pre-requisite preparation is critical. Table 7a shows the distribution of Opportunity and comparison students in demand training areas.

Table 7a
Distribution of Opportunity and Comparison Students in Demand Training Areas

Demand Area	Opportunity (N=3,681)	Pell Comparison (N=9,493)	Low-SES (N=7,556)
Health Science	40.8%	55.3%	50.3%
Business, Management & Administration	21.7%	20.1%	16.4%
Education & Training	9.8%	5.6%	11.2%
Manufacturing	9.0%	3.3%	6.3%
Mechanics and Repair	4.8%	3.1%	3.4%
Info. Tech.	3.5%	2.2%	3.5%
Law, Public Safety & Security	2.8%	2.8%	2.8%
Transportation, Distribution & Logistics	2.3%	0.6%	2.3%
Science, Tech., Engineering & Math	1.5%	1.0%	1.5%
Human Services	1.2%	3.3%	1.1%
Archit. & Const.	1.1%	1.0%	1.2%
Marketing, Sales & Services	1.1%	1.3%	1.1%
Agri., Food & Nat. Resources	0.5%	1.0%	0.5%

Opportunity students enrolled in more than 130 programs within the training areas. Table 7b shows the top 15 training programs that served Opportunity students. These programs served 2,748 Opportunity students (71 percent of total). It also shows how each program ranked for both the Pell comparison and low SES students. The programs listed served 6,494 Pell comparison and 5,505 low SES students (68 percent and 73 percent of their respective totals). Registered Nursing was the highest enrolled program by all three groups. The same programs mostly fell within the top 15 for all three student groups. Two office programs were in the top 25 for Pell comparison, while two others, driver and nursing assistant, fell below that.

Table 7b
Top 15 High Demand Opportunity Programs and Relative Rank Order
for Related Comparison Students

	Program	Opportunity Students	Pell Comparison Rank Order	Low-SES Students Rank Order
1	Registered Nursing	547	1	1
2	Early Childhood Educ & Tch	316	5	2
3	Medical/Clinical Asst	237	2	4
4	Practical Nursing	236	4	3
5	Welding Tech	224	12	6
6	Accounting Tech & Bookkpg	221	3	5
7	Nursing Asst/Aide	185	34	8
8	Office Mgmt & Supervision	161	8	10
9	Auto Mechanics	153	7	9
10	Business Admin & Mgmt	90	6	7
11	Crim Justice/Law Enforce	89	16	13
12	Med Admin Asst/Secty	85	10	16
13	Office Occs & Clerical	77	22	17
14	Truck & Bus Driver	72	44	20
15	Microcomputer Apps, Genl	55	25	14

Part IV: Fall to Spring Retention

Given the goal of the Opportunity Grants to assist students for up to 45 college credits, early student progress was measured in terms of persistence towards that goal or attainment of the “tipping point” and beyond. It should be noted that students who leave after they complete a certificate program backed by less than 45 credits are not counted toward persisting or completion under this definition; however, that does not mean the student did not satisfactorily complete this short program, only that she left before reaching the “tipping point”.

There were 1,412 Opportunity Grants students who started in fall 2007 and received Opportunity Grants during the year. Eighty-one (81) percent were retained through spring 2008 or left after reaching at least the “tipping point”. This compared to 73 percent during the pilot year.

Independent Students

Independent students who had their aid packaged with a Pell had an 87 percent retention rate. This compared to 72 percent for the Pell comparison group and just 44 percent for older low socioeconomic students. Independent Opportunity students without Pell had 71 percent retention, nearly the same retention rate as the Pell comparison and far better than the retention for the largely unaided 25 years and older students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The relatively strong retention even for this group suggests that the personalized service coupled with Opportunity Grants could also be a factor.

Table 8a shows retention rates alongside the percent of need met by aid for independent Opportunity, Pell and older low socioeconomic status students.

Table 8a
Independent Students Started in Fall and Retained or Reached “Tipping Point” by Spring

	Fall to Spring Retention Rate	% of Need Met by Total Grant Aid Package
Independent Opportunity students with Pell (n=786)	87%	55%
Independent Pell Comparison (n=3,687)	72%	44%
Independent Opportunity students without Pell (n=339)	71%	24%
Low Socioeconomic Status 25 or older(n=1,744)	44%	**

Fall to Spring Retention for Dependent Students

Table 8b shows the fall to spring retention for dependent Opportunity Grant students with and without Pell as part of their total grant aid package.

Table 8b
Dependent Students Started in Fall and Retained or Reached “Tipping Point” by Spring

	Fall to Spring Retention Rate	% of Need Met by Total Grant Aid Package
Dependent Opportunity with Pell (n=93)	90%	79%
Dependent Pell Comparison (n=953)	76%	63%
Dependent Opportunity without Pell (n=79)	63%	32%
Low Socioeconomic Status under 25 yrs (n=1,581)	59%	**

Full and Part-time Status

Another factor to consider in retention is the student’s full and part-time status. Just over two-thirds (67 percent) of all Opportunity students started full-time in the fall. This compared to 75 percent of the Pell comparison group and just 47 percent of the low-SES students.

Table 9a shows the retention and/or completion rates for independent aid and older low-SES students. The number who started in fall is shown in the parenthesis. Both full and part-time Opportunity with Pell students had higher rates than their Pell counterparts. Overall the difference between part-time Opportunity students and the other groups is notable.

Table 9a
Students that Started in the Fall and Were Still Enrolled or
Completed at the Tipping Point by Spring
for
Independent Aid and Older Low-SES Students Full and Part-time Status to Start

	Full-time	Part-time
Opportunity with Pell	89% (n=577)	84% (n=211)
Pell Comparison	75% (n=2057)	65% (n=780)
Opportunity Only	72% (n=198)	71% (n=141)
Low-SES	62% (n=514)	42% (n=742)

Table 9b shows the same analysis for dependent aid and younger low SES students. Part-time Opportunity students are again notable for their retention rates. Full-time Opportunity with Pell students also had higher retention than their Pell counterparts. Full-time Opportunity only students had a lower rate than their low SEs counterparts. This suggests a question of whether an Opportunity only aid package is sufficient for a full-time dependent student.

Table 9b
Students that Started in the Fall and Were Still Enrolled or
Completed at the Tipping Point by Spring
for
Dependent Aid and Younger Low-SES Students Full and Part-time Status to Start

	Full-time	Part-time
Opportunity with Pell	90% (n=70)	91% (n=23)
Pell Comparison	80% (n=623)	60% (n=129)
Opportunity Only	63% (n=49)	65% (n=31)
Low-SES	71% (n=654)	48% (n=526)

Program Retention

This section analyzes the retention/completion rates for all students combined in the top high demand training programs. The retention and/or completion rates for Opportunity students were consistently higher across program areas when they were compared to the Pell comparison and low SES groups. The differences within programs are consistent with the order of magnitudes found in the other analyses between Opportunity and comparison students.

The effect of program goal on the measure is noteworthy and must be analyzed using more detailed information about the individual programs. To illustrate this, consider the results for Opportunity students studying to be CNA. These students are retained at rates three times higher

than the low SES comparison group. However, their retention is considerably lower than the Pell comparison group. Why is this and why are the Opportunity CNA rates amongst the lowest in comparison to other Opportunity students?

The answer lies in how this program is designed and the student’s goal for taking it. CNA programs typically result in a short certificate for which the total program credits fall well below the “tipping point”. Therefore, in effect the completion definition being used in this report may be undercounting students who successfully completed the nursing aide certificate, but were still below the measurement threshold. Pell comparison students typically study for CNA as a pre-requisite for the nursing program.

One lesson in this may be that colleges also have a chance to do more with Opportunity Grants students. They can design the curriculum in these short programs to not only prepare students for the immediate employment goal, but also design it to raise their education levels for the next step on the path so the students are prepared to continue. CNA is a first step in many college health career pathways. However, there remains for many low skill students a large gap in their education levels to take that next step. This includes the need to increase their college readiness, which colleges should also consider by enhancing the curricula in short training programs. Opportunity Grants provide a chance to re-design programs and advise students for setting higher goals and providing programs that allow them to directly advance further toward them. These changes would reinforce the broader policy goal for raising attainment to the “tipping point” and beyond.

Table 10 below shows retention rates within the most popular programs.

Table 10
Fall to Spring Retention and/or Completion at Tipping Point and Beyond
In Selected Most Popular High Demand Programs

	Opportunity with Pell	Pell Comparison	Opportunity Only	Low-SES
Accounting Tech & Bookkpg	94%	76%	76%	57%
Auto Mechanics	92%	77%	86%	71%
Business Admin & Mgmt	76%	69%	63%	42%
Crim Justice/Law Enforce	78%	67%	67%	44%
Early Childhood Educ & Tch	95%	69%	68%	49%
Medical/Clinical Asst	90%	65%	57%	53%
Nursing Asst/Aide	n.a.	71%	47%	15%
Office Mgmt & Supervision	87%	69%	77%	34%
Office Occs & Clerical	93%	57%	70%	41%
Practical Nursing	96%	73%	100%	56%
Registered Nursing	91%	74%	82%	59%
Truck & Bus Driver	n.a.	n.a.	32%	11%
Welding Tech	86%	74%	61%	50%
Top 15	88%	73%	68%	53%

Measuring Student Achievement

As mentioned previously, SBCTC launched the Student Achievement Initiative in 2007, which is aimed at measuring student progress for the important incremental gains students make that lead to college success increasing academic achievement. The goal is to help more students reach the “tipping point” and beyond. These measures are called *achievement points*. Reaching achievement points is associated with higher rates of progression toward the “tipping point”. The points are in four categories: improving preparation for college-level courses, building towards a year of college credit, completing college math, and completing certificates, degrees and apprenticeships. A full description of the initiative is available at: http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/e_studentachievement.aspx.

Achievement points provide a way for colleges to measure themselves and to try out and measure practices that can improve achievement by increasing points. An explanation of how points are counted is included. In 2007-08, 3,871 Opportunity students earned 5,986 total Achievement Points. The table below shows the categories in which the Achievement Points were garnered.

Table 11
Achievement Points that Build Momentum to Tipping Point and Beyond
Opportunity Grant Students

2007-08					
Increase Basic Skills	Become College Ready	Earn 1st 15 College Credits	Earn 1st 30 College Credits	Earn 5 college credits in college level computation (technical programs) or quantitative reasoning (math/logic) class	Advancement to tipping point and beyond (certificates degrees)
1,790	1,274	1,156	873	385	508
Multiple-every time a student makes a significant test gain in math, listening or reading on CASAS or earns a GED/HS diploma.	Multiple-every time a student completes a level in pre-college English and/or math with the college’s minimum grade necessary to advance.	The first time each point is achieved.			Single count for earning degree, certificate or completing apprenticeship during the year. Certificates counted if 45 or more credits also earned.

Achievement Analysis

Students started the year with varying levels of achievement milestones already reached based upon their prior college experience. Table 12a assigns three categories of prior achievement for little to no prior college (less than 15 college credits earned); some prior college, but not college math (15 or more college credits earned) and college math (most students in this group also have at least 30 college credits). Only independent aided and older low SES students who started in the fall are included in the table.

Table 12a
Prior College Achievement for Independent Aid and Older Low SES Students who Started in Fall 2007

	Little to No Prior College Achievement	Some Prior, No College Math	Prior College Math
Full-time Opportunity with Pell (n=577)	42%	38%	20%
Full-time Pell Comparison (n=2057)	33%	43%	24%
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Full-time Opportunity Only (n=198)	59%	25%	16%
Full-time Low-SES (n=514)	34%	39%	27%
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Part-time Opportunity with Pell (n=211)	45%	40%	15%
Part-time Pell Comparison (n=780)	32%	42%	26%
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Part-time Opportunity Only (n=141)	60%	33%	7%
Part-time Low-SES (n=742)	38%	41%	21%

Independent Opportunity students who started in fall were more likely than their comparison counterparts to earn achievement points regardless of full and part-time status or prior achievement. The only exception is full time Opportunity with Pell students who start the year with some prior achievement. Fifty-nine (59) percent of these students earned achievement points compared to 63 percent of the Pell comparison group. However, additional analysis showed that the Opportunity students who did not earn points still had higher spring retention rates, suggesting that by next year they have a strong chance of ultimately exceeding the Pell comparison students. Table 12b shows the percents of independent and older students by their achievement levels to start who then increased achievement points during the year.

Table 12b
Achievement Point Rates
for
Independent Aid and Older Low-SES Students

	Little to No Prior College Achievement	Some Prior, No College Math	Prior College Math
Full-time Opportunity with Pell	96%	59%	53%
Full-time Pell Comparison	83%	63%	50%
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Full-time Opportunity Only	83%	57%	41%
Full-time Low-SES	34%	39%	27%
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Part-time Opportunity with Pell	81%	55%	50%
Part-time Pell Comparison	74%	50%	37%
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Part-time Opportunity Only	71%	45%	40%
Part-time Low-SES	38%	41%	21%

A similar analysis for dependent and younger students showed full time Opportunity with Pell students with little to no prior college were more likely to earn achievement points than their Pell comparison counterparts. Dependent Opportunity only students with little to no prior college were about as likely to earn achievement points as their low SES counterparts. Part-time dependent Opportunity students were substantially more likely than their younger low SES counterparts to achieve. These findings were consistent with earlier findings regarding retention for these groups. Other comparisons were limited by small student numbers.

College 2007-08 Opportunity Student Achievement Points

College	Student	Increase Basic Skills	Become College Ready	15 College Cr	30 College Cr	Quant Course	Tipping Point	Total Points
BATES	79	23	5	12	12	1	5	58
BELLEVUE	141	34	43	32	26	11	26	172
BELLINGHAM	108	145	33	36	31	17	19	281
BIG BEND	92	46	35	30	32	15	22	180
CASCADIA	23	0	5	8	2		1	16
CENTRALIA	171	51	79	57	47	29	20	283
CLARK	204	71	69	31	17	8	4	200
CLOVER PARK	175	13	55	53	46	20	26	213
COLUMBIA BASIN	110	78	37	17	25	12	6	175
EDMONDS	104	103	49	38	28	4	13	235
EVERETT	129	5	39	45	24	14	8	135
GRAYS HARBOR	68	8	35	24	16	10	11	104
GREEN RIVER	242	48	30	65	31	17	29	220
HIGHLINE	98	116	96	28	25	12	7	284
LAKE WASHINGTON	107	39	57	42	28	24	19	209
LOWER COLUMBIA	107	15	102	41	21	6	9	194
OLYMPIC	138	12	52	52	36	11	30	193
PENINSULA	75	45	23	30	23	4	23	148
PIERCE FORT STEILACOOM	235	172	61	88	49	20	22	412
PIERCE PUYALLUP	148	44	63	37	29	13	1	187
RENTON	118	20	6	35	31	13	20	125
SEATTLE CENTRAL	96	65	32	23	16	7	6	149
SEATTLE NORTH	116	43	27	43	27	6	8	154
SEATTLE SOUTH	117	15	8	24	33	7	41	128
SEATTLE VOC INSTITUTE	5	0	0	2	4		4	10
SHORELINE	92	113	11	27	30	14	21	216
SKAGIT VALLEY	140	170	33	39	33	22	5	302
SOUTH PUGET SOUND	101	24	13	32	22	10	4	105
SPOKANE COMMUNITY	113	0	24	28	22	11	13	98
SPOKANE FALLS	92	58	13	46	32	1	9	159
TACOMA	61	37	32	24	13	6	5	117
WALLA WALLA	86	0	7	9	12	16	32	76
WENATCHEE VALLEY	95	21	53	26	18	11	13	142
WHATCOM	66	11	24	18	21	9	9	92
YAKIMA VALLEY	111	145	23	14	11	4	17	214