

State Need Grant Less-than-Half-Time Pilot Project

Report to the Legislature

December 2013

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INTRODUCTION

By December 2013, the Washington Student Achievement Council is required to report the number of State Need Grant (SNG) students enrolled in three to five quarter credits and their academic progress, including degree completion (3ESHB 2127 (2012)). This report includes information on the history of the less-than-half-time pilot, funding, and program findings.

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) will release a report in January 2014 detailing academic outcomes for State Need Grant students. The Council will work with WSIPP to use the larger SNG academic outcomes dataset to provide a more detailed comparison of outcomes for less-than-half-time students compared to students at other enrollment levels. This information will be provided to members of the higher education committees during the legislative session.

BACKGROUND

The SNG program began serving students in 1971. For eighteen years, only full-time enrolled students (those taking 12 credits or more) were eligible for the award. The legislature extended eligibility to part-time students enrolled half-time or greater (six credits or more) in 1989.

The 2005 Legislature appropriated \$500,000 for the biennium and authorized a pilot study for nine schools to evaluate the need for and the costs of expanding the SNG program to less-than-half-time students enrolled in four or five credits. The goals of the pilot included the following:

- Improve access to financial aid for less-than-half-time students.
- Keep students on track to graduate by allowing them to reduce their coursework temporarily while still receiving aid.
- Better serve a population with a higher percentage of both single parents and independent students.

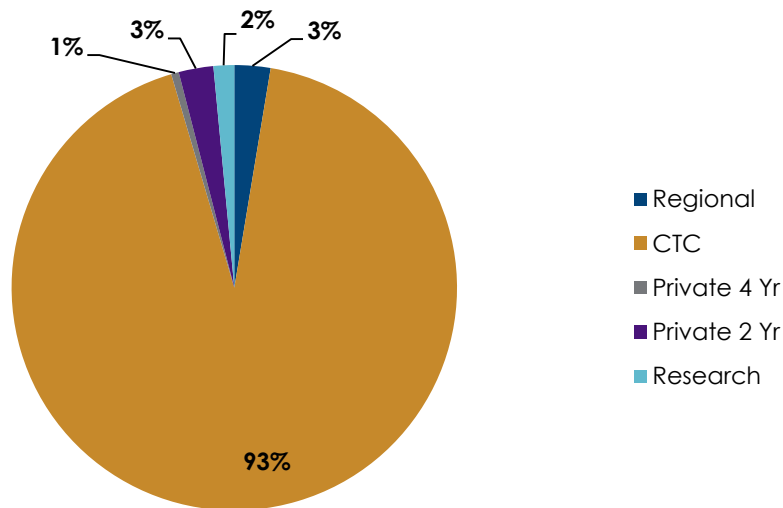
The Council submitted a legislative report in December 2006 (<http://www.wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/SNG-LTHFullreport-PDF.pdf>). The 2007 Legislature extended the pilot program until June 2011 (ESHB 1179), expanding the program to all SNG-participating institutions and permitting student enrollment less than half-time (three quarter credits or equivalent).

The 2011 Legislature further extended the pilot program until June 2013. In addition, less-than-half-time funds were included in the overall SNG budget, removing the annual funding limitation for this population and the need to track funds separately.

2012-13 PROGRAM RESULTS

For fiscal year 2012-13, over 7,400 students were eligible to receive a less-than-half-time award. Participating SNG institutions disbursed just over \$1 million to over 3,000 less-than-half-time students. The large majority of recipients (93 percent) attended community and technical colleges (see Figure 1). Students in this sector received 89 percent of the total funding provided to less-than-half-time students.

Figure 1
Less-than-Half-Time Recipients by Sector 2012-13



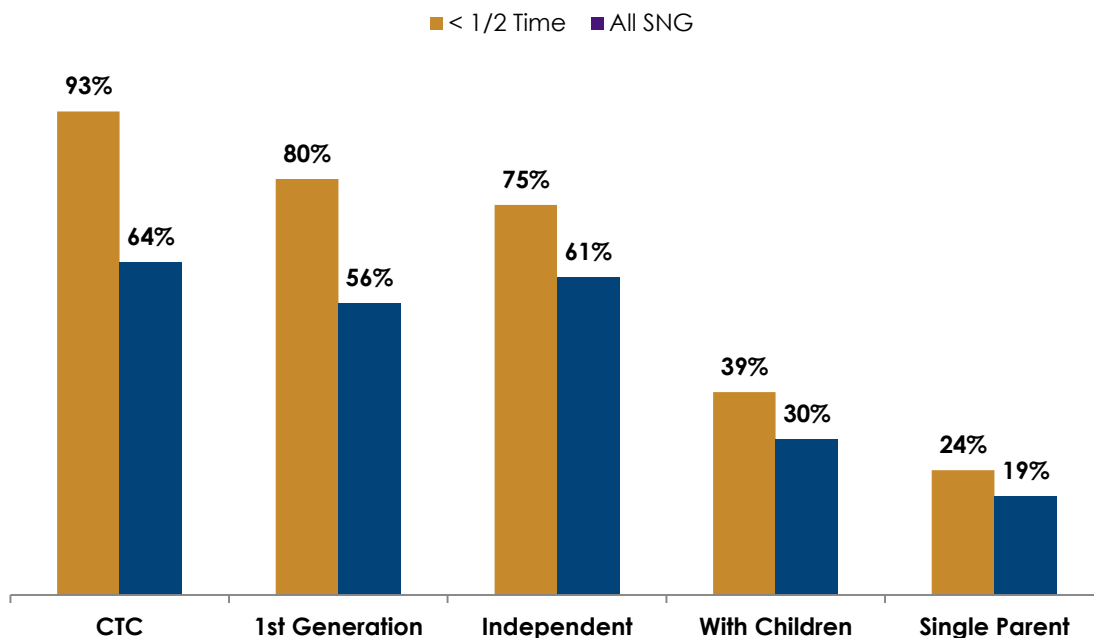
Students are eligible to receive 25 percent of the maximum award amount, depending on the sector of attendance and median family income range for the student. The majority of students attended in this enrollment status temporarily. The average award during the less-than-half-time terms was \$344; however, the average overall amount of State Need Grant received for these students was \$1,535.

A student survey in 2006 affirmed that the ability to maintain momentum has been critical for students when circumstances dictate the need to reduce enrollment temporarily. Students responding to the survey listed multiple reasons for attending less than half-time:

- Work hours
- Costs
- Family obligations
- Child care needs
- Ability to take a course out of sequence
- Ability to focus on one challenging course
- Ability to attend summer term

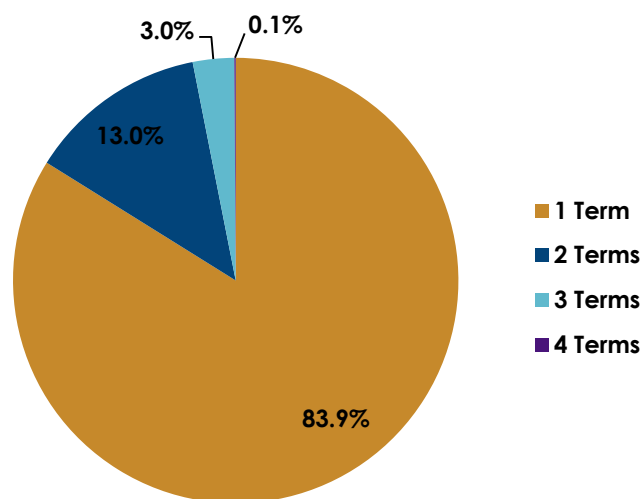
Students who enroll in one class during a term are more likely to be financially independent, attend a two-year college, be the first in their family to attend college, and have children (see Figure 2).

Figure 2
Profile of Less-Than-Half-Time Students Compared to All SNG Recipients 2012-13



Most students enroll at this rate on a temporary basis—84 percent were in this status for only one term (see Figure 3).

Figure 3
Number of Terms Enrolled Less-than-Half-Time



CONCLUSION

Expanding SNG eligibility to this group of part-time students appears to have made a difference in their ability to remain enrolled in a postsecondary institution. The Council will provide additional academic outcomes for this population after the release of findings by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) in January 2014.

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