What is the Richmond Promise?

Launched in January 2016, the Richmond Promise is a community-wide college scholarship fund and college success initiative to build a college-graduating culture in Richmond. The Richmond Promise, now an independent 501(c)3 nonprofit, was made possible by the Richmond City Council, which set aside $35 million over 10 years from a $90 million community benefits agreement connected to the $1 billion Chevron Richmond Refinery Modernization Project.

What is the goal of the Promise?

The Richmond Promise aims to provide every college-going high school senior from Richmond who attends a local public, private or charter school with up to $1,500 annually to attend a 2-year or 4-year college or university, or Career Technical Education Program. To date, the Richmond Promise has pledged $3.4 million dollars in college scholarships and is currently supporting over 578 Richmond Promise Scholars at 82 college campuses across the country. Over 70% of Richmond Promise scholarship recipients are the first person in their family to go to college.

Does the Promise provide support beyond the scholarships?
Yes! The Richmond Promise is a home base for college support. Recognizing that removing financial barriers is just one part of the equation for college access and success, the Richmond Promise is a unified effort on behalf of the City of Richmond, WCCUSD, Contra Costa College, University of California and California State University systems to remove barriers and create pathways to college access and success. Along with the scholarship, the Richmond Promise works with the WCCUSD and community partners to provide support to complete financial aid applications.

What other ways does the Richmond Promise prepare students for college?

The Richmond Promise also builds early college awareness and college-knowledge through the Near Peer Ambassador Program at Kennedy High School where college students from Richmond are trained to have college and career conversations with 9th graders. The Richmond Promise supports students through degree completion – providing summer college success workshops, and serving as a connector to resources and partnerships with Contra Costa College, UC Berkeley and others.

Why did the City help create the Richmond Promise?

In periodic surveys taken about Richmond, respondents typically list “poor schools,” or something similar, as a significant negative attribute of Richmond. I don’t necessarily believe this, but it is clearly a deeply embedded perception that holds back economic growth and development. In order for Richmond to progress as a city, we have to change that perception, which makes it a city challenge and not just a school district challenge. Promise programs, which have a history of creating a college-going culture, increasing college attendance, and raising both expectations and performance of students, can change both the realty and perceptions of education in Richmond. The City of Richmond recognizes education as a critical part of creating a healthy, vibrant and equitable community.

Why is going to (and graduating from) college important?

We know that a college degree is a key requirement for the jobs of the future. The Richmond Promise aims to prepare our young people to compete for those jobs and build and sustain a strong college-going culture in our community.

How will the Richmond Promise change Richmond?
The Richmond Promise has the potential to shift the dominant narrative of what it means to be from Richmond. We want our young people in Richmond to go to college, get a degree, and also hopefully come back to Richmond to become positive leaders in our community.

What advice would you give to kids that want to go to college?

Work hard! Apply for the Richmond Promise! Know your resources – don’t be afraid to ask for help and advocate for yourself. Remember: you belong there. You have a community that believes in you, is invested in your success and is here to support and celebrate you through your college graduation!

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