

The 2023 Year One Report
ACT 457 of the 2021 Regular Session of the Louisiana Legislature
Murphy J. Foster Promise Award Program



INTRODUCTION (BACKGROUND)

Act 457 of Louisiana's 2021 Regular Legislative Session, co-authored by Senate President Page Cortez and House Speaker Clay Schexnayder, was signed by Governor John Bel Edwards on June 23, 2021. Named after former Louisiana Governor Murphy J. "Mike" Foster, this legislation created a \$10.5 million annual state fund to provide workforce training opportunities for the state's working-age adults who have not yet earned a degree (legislation can be accessed here: [ACT 457 \(2021\)](#)).

The purpose of the program is to provide financial assistance to eligible students enrolled in two-year public postsecondary institutions and accredited proprietary schools approved by the Board of Regents to pursue an associate's degree or a short-term credential aligned with Louisiana's workforce priorities. The effective date of the M.J. Foster Promise Award Program (MJFP) was the 2022-2023 academic year.

Award recipients must pursue an associate's degree or shorter-term postsecondary credential tied to specific high-demand, high-wage occupations aligned to Louisiana's workforce priorities. The program funds enrollment in high-demand majors related to growing industry sectors, including construction, healthcare, information technology, manufacturing, and transportation and logistics (the complete list can be found at [MJFP Approved Programs](#)).

The M.J. Foster Promise Award Program is critical in helping reach the goal set forth in the Board of Regents Master Plan, *Louisiana Prospers*, of 60% credential attainment for the state's population by 2030. With the growth of participants and completers in the program, the MJFP Award provides financial support for students to complete their education and training to earn high-demand credentials, which ultimately contributes to a significant influx of working-age adults needed for high-value positions in Louisiana's economy.

Program eligibility requirements are as follows: applicants must be Louisiana residents (21 years or older) and meet a family income threshold of 300% of the Federal Poverty Level or be unemployed or underemployed for six months. The awards are available on a first-come, first-served basis and accessible to the student for three years. In this initial year, the program covers the cost of tuition and required fees after all other sources of aid have been applied (excluding student loans and federal work-study [MJFP Award Information](#)). Act 284 of the 2023 Legislative Session allows the scholarship to be used before all other sources of aid for an eligible student's first semester of support.

The award amount of \$3,200 per award year, or \$1,600 per semester, is for a student enrolled full-time. Part-time students receive a proportional amount. Students can receive a maximum of \$6,400 over three years. A student may receive the maximum award amount of \$6,400 in one year for certain high-cost programs ([MJFP Award Information](#)).

Compliance with reporting requirements is a condition of an institution's continued eligibility to receive payments from the state on behalf of award recipients and shall be determined annually by the administering agency.

As required by law, the Board of Regents has established an advisory council and identified qualified programs that provide the high-value credentials this program supports. The advisory council is comprised of the following members or their designees: chancellors of LSU Eunice and Southern University Shreveport, the president of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System, the Commissioner of Higher Education, the State Superintendent of Education, the Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Economic Development, the Executive Director of the Louisiana Workforce Commission, the Chairman of the Louisiana Workforce Investment Council and the Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Revenue.

Furthermore, the law requires the Board of Regents to administer the program through LOSFA. Overall, for the 2022-2023 award year, 6,882 applicants were evaluated for eligibility to receive program funds. Of the total applicants, 3,660 were eligible, 1,970 were ineligible, 1,224 were cancelled, and 28 were withdrawn. Cancellations and withdrawals consisted of students who voluntarily withdrew for a variety of reasons, were not enrolled in an approved program, were not enrolled during the award year or did not adhere to enrollment deadlines. In total \$2,712,371.36 was dispersed to students in Year 1 (as of 9/25/23).

METHODOLOGY

To gather the requested data for the report, eligible institutions offering the program were identified: Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS) institutions, LSU Eunice (LSUE), Southern University Shreveport (SUSLA), and accredited proprietary schools licensed by the Board of Regents. The dataset for year one of the program includes students enrolled in MJFP-approved majors and non-credit programs at LCTCS institutions, LSUE, and SUSLA. Approximately 150 proprietary institutions are licensed in the state, of which thirty-three offer credentials that are eligible for the award. BOR worked with these proprietary institutions to gather their enrollment and outcomes data.

Staff worked to identify both program awardees who enrolled in eligible credential programs and credential completers from all eligible institutions. Non-awardees in eligible programs were also identified, to provide comparison data whenever possible.

BOR, LOSFA, and LWC relied on previously established intra-agency Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) governing data-sharing to acquire the necessary data for this report.

RESULTS

Act 457 (2021) required that the Board of Regents submit a written report to the legislature to include all the information for the preceding academic year as listed below:

- The mean length of time required for award recipients to complete a qualified program as compared to other completers of the program who did not receive the award.
- Demographic information of award recipients, including age, race, gender, and household income.
- Pre- and post-award employment information, including employment status, annual wages, and employer's industry sector.
- Recidivism rates of award recipients.
- The administering agency shall, with the cooperation and assistance of the state's public two-year postsecondary education institutions and proprietary schools, annually query each first-time award recipient to determine the extent receiving the award influenced the recipient's decision to enroll in postsecondary education.

All data requested and analyzed are reported in the aggregate only and contain no personally identifiable information.

Program Completion Information

Program completion data compared the time to degree for MJFP award recipients in public and proprietary institutions with students in the same programs who did not receive MJFP funding.

The chart below (Chart 1) provides data for students who completed eligible credentials in public postsecondary institutions and proprietary schools in the first year of the program. For each credential level, time to degree is compared for students who received and did not receive MJFP funding. Altogether, 188 students earned 199 credentials.

First, students earned 115 credentials that could be completed in a year or less. Award recipients and non-recipients earned these Career Technical Certificates, short-term Diplomas, and Industry-Recognized Certifications in similar, if not identical, lengths of time.

Second, students completed 84 eligible diploma or associate's degree programs. These programs cannot be completed in a single year; consequently, these students must have begun their studies before the introduction of the MJFP award. The average time to degree for these programs was significantly longer for the award recipients than for the non-recipients (3.0 vs. 2.1 years for diploma earners and 8.9 vs. 4.7 years for associate's earners). This suggests that the funds provided by the MJFP award enabled people who otherwise would have had some college but no degree to complete their credentials.

Chart 1

Credential Completions by Award Level - 2022-2023				
	MJFP Awardee Completions		Non-MJFP Awardee Completions	
Degree Level	Headcount	Average Time-to-Degree (Years)***	Headcount	Average Time-to-Degree (Years)***
Career Tech 1-8 cr. hrs.	**	0.3	788	1.2
Career Tech 9-18 cr. hrs.	**	1.1	851	1.1
Certificate (One Year)	**	2.6	2,651	1.6
Diploma*	40	3.0	2,327	2.1
Associate*	34	8.9	2,283	4.7
Cert. or Diploma < than 3 Months			186	0.5
Cert. or Diploma 3 months to 6 months	**	0.7	235	0.8
Cert. or Diploma 6 months to 1 year	46	1.0	1,091	1.0
Cert. or Diploma 1 year to 2 years	**	1.1	408	1.2
Associate in Occ. Studies	**	1.9	254	1.6
Credential of Value	11	0.3	2,171	0.3
On-Ramp	13	0.4	768	0.3
Totals	168***		14,013	

*Students started their associate's programs prior to the start of the M. J. Foster Promise Program.

** n=< 10

*** Calculation of time-to-degree requires a start date and an end date. The data for 31 credentials did not have a start date or end date; therefore, they were not included in the time-to-degree calculations.

Chart 2 shows the race and gender demographics of those 188 students who completed credentials. These data demonstrate that program support is effective across races and genders in enabling people to complete their credentials.

Chart 2

Completers by Race and Gender - 2022-2023				
Completers	Female	Male	Total for Race	Percent by Race
Black, Non-Hispanic	107	21	128	68%
White, Non-Hispanic	29	19	48	26%
Hispanic	**	**	**	5%
Asian	**		**	1%
Two or More Races	**	**	**	1%
Total for Gender	143	45	188	100%
Percent by Gender	76%	24%	100%	

** n=< 10

Chart 3 provides the top seven programs with MJFP program completions. The healthcare profession had the largest number of completers, a clear need in our state. Further analysis finds that the top five healthcare program completions were Licensed Practical Nurse (46), Registered Nurse (20), Medical Assistant (19), and Nursing Aide (18).

Chart 3

MJFP Awardee Completions by Program Area - 2022-2023	
Program Description	Total
Health Professions and Related Programs	149
Construction Trades	17
Computer and Information Sciences and Support services	9
Engineering/Engineering-Related Technologies/Technicians	7
Transportation and Materials Moving	7
Mechanic and Repair Technologies/Technicians	5
Precision Production	5

Program Participant Demographic Information

Act 457 (2021) requires demographic information of program participants, including age, race, gender, and household income.

Chart 4 considers MJFP participants by race and gender. Black students represent the largest number of participants at 46%, followed by white students at 16% and Asian students at 9%. When gender is added to the analysis, Black males represent the highest participation percentage rate at 50%, followed by Black females at 45% and white males at 27%.

Chart 4

Race by Gender for MJFP Funding Recipients - 2022-2023						
	Female		Male		Total	
Race	Headcount	Percent	Headcount	Percent	Headcount	Percent
Black, Non-Hispanic	443	45%	108	50%	551	46%
White, Non-Hispanic	130	14%	56	27%	186	16%
Hispanic Of Any Race	27	3%	**	3%	34	3%
Asian	106	10%	11	5%	117	9%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	**	0%		0%	**	0%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	**	1%		0%	**	0%
Two or More Races	10	1%	10	5%	20	2%
Unknown	253	26%	20	9%	273	23%
Grand Total	976	100%	212	100%	1,188****	100%

** n=< 10

*** Gender data for 4 students was not available

Chart 5 looks at the age ranges of MJFP funding recipients. Eligible students must be 21 or older. Of the total MJFP recipients (1,192), more than half (51%) are 30 or older, and 77% are 25 or older.

Chart 5

Age Ranges for MJFP Funding Recipients - 2022-2023		
Age Range	Headcount	Percent
21-24	226	23%
25-29	317	25%
30-39	428	34%
40 +	221	17%
Grand Total	1,192	100%

The final required data point for demographic information is personal income for MJFP recipients. The program requires participants to meet a family income threshold of 300% of the [Federal Poverty Level](#) or be unemployed or underemployed for six months. Chart 6 illustrates the various household income levels of recipients. 81% of recipients fall into the two lowest income levels: 60% of recipients make less than \$30,000 per year, and 21% fall into the \$30,000-\$49,999 per year income group.

Consequently, almost 60% of recipients had household incomes below the Household Survival Budget for an adult (\$26,760), and 81% had household incomes below the [ALICE Household Survival Budget](#) for a family of 4 (\$66,280).

Chart 6

Income by Groups for MJFP Funding Recipients - 2022-2023		
Household Income	Headcount	Percent
Less than \$30,000	729	60%
\$30,000 to \$49,999	253	21%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	72	6%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	27	3%
\$100,000 +	20	2%
Unknown	91	8%
Grand Total	1,192	100%

Employment Information

An analysis of the wage income of recipients before beginning their program of study showed that those who were employed earned an average annual salary of \$24,084. All credential completers for whom wage data were available before beginning the program had annual salaries below the ALICE threshold for a family of four in Louisiana, and 65% were below the Federal Poverty Level.

Given that this is the first year of the program, insufficient time has elapsed for the analysis of post-completion wage data. Those data will be analyzed in the following annual report.

Recidivism Rates

Given that this is the first year of the program, insufficient time has elapsed for analysis of the recidivism of Year One recipients. Those data will be analyzed in the following annual report.

Yearly Student Survey

The legislation requires an annual survey of every first-time award recipient to determine how the MJFP award influenced their decision to enroll in college. LOSFA was asked to survey all students who met the eligibility criteria. The total survey population consisted of 2,295 eligible students. Of the total surveys sent, 346 students responded, yielding a 15.1% response rate. Of the total population (346 students), 208 students received funding. Of these 208 award recipients, 139, or 67%, said that the award influenced their decision to enroll in a postsecondary institution (Chart 7). In contrast, 33% reported that the award did not influence their decision to enroll.

Chart 7

M.J. Foster Promise Survey Results – 2022-2023		
Did Receiving the M.J. Foster Promise Award Influence Your Decision to Enroll in Postsecondary Education?		
Yes, It Did Influence	139	67%
No, It Did Not Influence	69	33%
Total Survey Respondents Awarded Funding	208	100%

CONCLUSION

Implications/Recommendations

The Murphy J. Foster Promise Award Program was developed to assist adult students by providing funding for workforce education and training opportunities in high-value programs. Funding is available to recipients for up to three years to attain an associate's degree, diploma, or short-term stackable credential.

The data in this report demonstrate that the program, as established, directly benefits its intended population. Almost 1,200 students received funds to support their education. Of those students, 81% were women, and nearly half were African American. There are high representation and participation rates among Black male recipients and students from lower socio-economic brackets. Most of the students were 30 years or older, and 60% had a household income below the ALICE Survival Budget threshold for an adult in Louisiana. While many of those students who received funds are still pursuing their credentials, 188 were able to complete within the first award year. We will monitor progress and gather data related to the successes of the remaining students. These outcomes will be included in future reports.

In future years, we will also be able to analyze the economic impacts that the credentials earned have had on the prosperity of the recipients and their families, but the potential for success is significant.