El Dorado, Arkansas, population 18,000, is a small Southern town just north of the Louisiana border. The county seat of Union County, El Dorado, known as ‘The Original Boomtown’ has an interesting history, closely tied to the oil and timber industries.

El Dorado was a bustling boomtown in the 1920s and enjoyed continued growth through the 1950s. The area has a very strong historical industrial base but was impacted by globalization and the declining economy in the 1980s, resulting in lost population. However, the city remained strong through economic downturns. It ranks 2nd of the 75 counties in Arkansas in per capita personal income and 29th of 576 counties in surrounding states. El Dorado has a large industrial workforce, and is also home to three NYSE-traded companies.

One of those companies is Murphy Oil Corporation, an international oil and gas company which has had its corporate headquarters in El Dorado since its inception in 1950, although its roots go back to the 1920s.

Murphy has been a strong community supporter throughout its history, focusing primarily on educational endeavors. It’s founder, Charles H. Murphy, Jr., was described as an educator at heart, even more so than a businessman. He believed, “with good education, people are more productive. To educate people is good business.”

Murphy’s Board of Directors continued the belief of the transformative power of education.

Enrollment in the district dropped by 10% from 1990 to 2005, and population had been on a steady decline as well, two trends which could be found in all districts in south Arkansas at the time. Murphy, through its philanthropic focus on education, began the Murphy Education Program, an academic incentive program which rewards students in the El Dorado School District for their scores on standardized tests, in 1997.

In December 2006, Murphy’s Board of Directors was presented with a recommendation for a new education program. Claiborne Deming was President and CEO at the time and presented to the Board the opportunity to fund a program which would have a lasting impact on the graduates of El Dorado High School, a revitalization of the El Dorado School District and potential for renewed economic development for the community. Deming recalls how quickly the Board approved the proposal, “It was the easiest decision we made all day.” The proposal was a $50 million dollar universal scholarship program for the students in the El Dorado School District. It would be called the El Dorado Promise and it promised to change El Dorado.

Unlike traditional forms of financial aid, the El Dorado Promise is a universal program, which means there are no merit or financial need requirements. The only requirement is to graduate from El Dorado High School, after having been enrolled since at least ninth grade.

History

“The Promise opened doors at lower levels to start talking about college. It changed our strategy to make us realize we need to prepare all students for college by working with them on higher reading and writing levels.”

- Jeannie Strother, Literacy Chair
The Announcement

After Murphy’s Board of Directors approved funding for the Promise, the public announcement was made a few weeks later. On January 22, 2007, in the “old” El Dorado High School gym, a crowd of students, teachers, community members and parents gathered for a special assembly. No one knew what the assembly was about or why they had been called there under such mysterious circumstances. When the guests arrived, they realized it was going to be an important announcement. The high school principal, the district superintendent, the President of Murphy Oil and the governor all gathered behind the podium, the crowd waiting anxiously for what they knew would be an impactful message.

“I remember that day – after the announcement, we went back to class and the kids were speechless. One student in my class was completely overcome with emotion, to the point that she couldn’t come back to class. She was a great student and all of her friends knew they were going to college, but she was never sure. She didn’t think she would be able to go because of her financial situation. When I spoke to her, she just said, ‘I can go to college now!’ She had just been given the greatest gift she could have been given.”

-Karen Greer, EHS Math Instructional Facilitator and AP Calculus teacher

“We have brought you here today to tell you about a special program that will make the El Dorado School District, and those young people who attend its schools, different and unique. Something that gives them an opportunity for post-secondary education that you would not have dreamed or imagined in your lifetime.”

– Bob Watson, El Dorado Public Schools Superintendent in 2007

“I was in the gym when the announcement was made and I remember looking around and seeing students in tears. They were very emotional, many had tears streaming down their face. It was such an overwhelming, emotional announcement. It was life-changing, really. It was just so unexpected and so much bigger than anyone could have ever imagined.”

– Becky Ward, former EHS Counselor
Details Of The Promise

The El Dorado Promise, funded by Murphy Oil Corporation, gives students in the El Dorado, Arkansas school district - regardless of their economic situation or academic merit - an opportunity to pursue a college degree, free of financial burden.

The El Dorado Promise awards every EHS graduate, who has been continually enrolled in the El Dorado School District since at least ninth grade, a scholarship covering tuition and mandatory fees equal to the highest in-state, public university rate.

The scholarship is renewable over five consecutive years if the student maintains a 2.0 grade point average and successfully completes 12 credit hours per semester. The El Dorado Promise can be used at any regionally accredited U.S. public or private college or university for students working toward an associate’s or bachelor’s degree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Attendance</th>
<th>Benefit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grades K-12</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades 1-12</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades 2-12</td>
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<td>Grades 3-12</td>
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<td>Grades 5-12</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades 6-12</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students entering the school district after ninth grade are not eligible for the Promise.

“We’re always pushing for excellence as an educator, but you are often pushing against a barrier you don’t have control of. But now, that that barrier is gone, it’s on us, the teachers, because there is nothing stopping them now.”

-Jeremy Gray, EHS Assistant Principal

“Many parents talk to their children about ‘where’ they are going to college from a young age. Thanks to Murphy Oil’s gift of the El Dorado Promise all parents of El Dorado Public School students, no matter their economic status, can talk to their children about ‘where’ they are going to college, not ‘if’ they are going to college.”

-Sylvia Thompson, El Dorado Promise Director
Results of the Promise

The anticipated results of the El Dorado Promise were that it would produce an increase in higher education outcomes, that there would be improvements in academic achievements in the school district from kindergarten through 12th grade and that there would be positive changes in community and economic developments.

**Increased Higher Education Outcomes**

**Improved College - Going Rates**

Over 84% of the Promise-eligible 2016 EHS graduates are attending college. This percentage is significantly higher than both the current Arkansas college-going rate, at 50.1%, and the national rate at 65.9% (According to the Arkansas Department of Education). This number is also higher than the college-going rate of EHS graduates prior to the Promise, which was 60%.

**K-12 Improvements**

**Increased Enrollment**

Prior to the Promise, enrollment in the El Dorado School District had been on a steady decline, as had other districts in Union County and other comparable districts. Data indicates that while the overall enrollment number for the District is greater than it was when the Promise was announced, the more significant news is what the current enrollment looks like if compared to projections of where the district would be had the Promise not been implemented. Compared to the expected student enrollment, based on prior trends, El Dorado has experienced a 15.5% increase in enrollment above expectations (representing more than 600 students in the district that served more than 4,500 students in 2015-2016.) Comparative districts continued on the projected decline.
Higher Test Scores

Since the Promise began, and more students are going to college, they realized they must work hard to prepare themselves. As the district reviewed research-based curriculum to better prepare all students for college, Advanced Placement courses from College Board had the data to show that students who took AP courses had an improved college success rate and finished college in a shorter period of time. In 2007, the district applied to become a member of Arkansas Advanced Initiative to Improve Math and Science (AIMMS). The district was one of eight schools selected. The goals of this endeavor were to increase the number of students taking AP courses, increase the diversity of the AP students, and to increase the number of passing scores.

Parent meetings were held to better inform families of the importance of rigorous course work and the role it played in college success. As a result, parents, students and teachers began demanding more rigorous courses of study, and more students are enrolling in AP classes. This caused a change in curriculum and Pre-AP classes now begin in middle school. Introducing students to pre-AP earlier has resulted in an increase in AP enrollments in high school. AP enrollment at EHS has increased 164% over the past 10 years. The number of AP classes offered has increased from three in 2000, to 19 classes now. From less than 100 students choosing AP courses, now well over 400 students select the most demanding classes. Even with the dramatic increase in the number of students taking AP courses, the passing rate of EHS students has remained steady. In 2011, El Dorado School District was selected to be included in College Board’s AP Achievement List for Significant Gains in AP Access and Student Performance. From the 12,000 school districts who offer AP courses in the United States, only 388 districts were selected nationwide with only two from Arkansas. Everyone has higher expectations. AP courses are continually added as student demand indicates their need. At El Dorado High School, all AP courses are “open enrollment,” meaning any student can register for any AP class. Consequently, the academic culture of the staff and students has changed.

“We used to only talk about the ACT in AP classes, now we talk to all students about it, because college can be for everyone, now.”

-Alva Reibe, EHS Principal

“It ups the level and quality of education offered in the classrooms and it provides me, as a teacher, some leverage. I teach freshmen but the Promise allows me to start talking to them about college. Especially my students who, traditionally, that would not be a path for them. It provides me with leverage to say, ‘no, this is a possibility for you. You don’t have to say, no, I can’t afford it.’”

-Alyssa Folk, EHS Algebra I Teacher, Teacher Leader
Culture Change

The Promise spurred a culture change throughout the school district. Since the new expectation was that all EHS students would go to college, the atmosphere within the district changed to a college-going culture. This culture change involved realizing a large portion of students in the district would be first-generation college students, which means their home support group didn’t have the experiences, or the understanding of college, needed to prepare their student. The school district has transformed itself into a college preparedness center – preparing its students academically as well as attitudinally.

Creating a college-going culture also means making college a common discussion among all students.

College T-Shirt Wednesday

Every Wednesday throughout the district has been declared “College T-shirt Day”. Students and staff are encouraged to wear a college t-shirt to school on Wednesday. In several schools within the District, teachers post a sign outside their classroom with the name of the college they attended. This is another way that the District keeps the conversation of college going all the time with the students. Seeing a sign showing where their teacher went to college or talking about a specific college because someone had on a shirt with that college name on it, are simple ways to get the students to start thinking about college and how it is a very real possibility for them, too.

I graduated High School in 2007 and College in 2015. I’d like to call my success story: Making Good on the Promise. Those eight years taught me the most about life. The fall of my junior year, my mother’s health began to decline and she lost her ability to walk. The decision was made that she would move to Conway so that I could continue my education and take care of her. It was difficult taking a full course load, working, and taking care of my mother. The El Dorado Promise helped make this easier because I never had to add the stress of paying for school to my plate.

There were many students at UCA who were amazed at the scholarship opportunity that was given to the graduates of EHS. I had to constantly remind them that the El Dorado Promise is just that, an opportunity.

-Catherine Miller, EHS 2007, University of Central Arkansas, 2015
Pay It Forward

The first day after Christmas break each year, before college students return to their campuses, El Dorado Promise Scholars return to EHS to share their college experiences with underclassmen. The students come to “Pay It Forward” and allow those students who are looking toward attending college in the next year to learn from their experiences. They share tips for college success, such as “get to know your professors” and “don’t think you don’t have to study just because you didn’t study in high school,” and encouragement to help the students while still in high school like, “take high school seriously, your grades really do matter and the more you learn here, the easier you will have it when you get to college.”

On January 3, 2017, Promise Scholars representing four different EHS graduating classes came to the high school campus to share their college experiences with underclassmen.

College and Career Coaches

In the fall of 2016, El Dorado High School was chosen to pilot a College and Career Readiness program in conjunction with South Arkansas Community College. This program is funded through the Arkansas Department of Higher Education. The program placed college and career coaches at Barton Junior High and El Dorado High School. These coaches coordinate a series of age and grade appropriate strategies and pathways for advancing students, beginning in the 7th grade, year-by-year to high school graduation, college enrollment, college completion and career placement. The coaches work in conjunction with the existing counseling staff and the El Dorado Promise Director.

The College and Career Coach at EHS is Greg Crew, a Promise Graduate from the class of 2012. Greg attended Missouri State University and graduated in May 2016. He brings a unique perspective to his role in which he gets to interact with students who are walking the same halls he walked as a student just a few short years ago.

“As a parent, the Promise opened up possibilities outside what we could do for our children. It allowed them to think bigger about what their potential was. As an educator, it made it more of a conscientious thing for me to know that my students were going to go to that next level and they needed me to adequately prepare them for it.”

-Jennifer Murphy, EHS Literacy Instructional Facilitator and Promise parent
The Promise Has Taken Them There

When EHS graduates think about their future and where they want to be, they know they have the Promise to help get them on that path. The Promise can take them where they want to go. In fact, the Promise has taken the 2,025 Promise recipients to 129 different colleges and universities in 29 different states.

Arkansas Schools - 29
Arkansas Baptist College (Little Rock AR)
Arkansas State University (Jonesboro AR)
Arkansas State University - Newport (Newport AR)
Arkansas Tech University (Russellville AR)
Baptist Health (Little Rock AR)
Central Baptist College (Conway AR)
Harding University (Searcy AR)
Henderson State University (Arkadelphia AR)
Hendrix College (Conway AR)
Lyon College (Batesville AR)
National Park Community College (Hot Springs AR)
North Arkansas College (Harrison AR)
Northwest Arkansas Community College (Bentonville AR)
Ouachita Baptist University (Arkadelphia AR)
Philander Smith College (Little Rock AR)
South Arkansas Community College (El Dorado AR)
Southern Arkansas University Tech (Camden AR)
Southern Arkansas University (Magnolia AR)
St Vincent Health (Little Rock AR)
University of Arkansas (Fayetteville AR)
University of Arkansas - Ft Smith (Ft Smith AR)
University of Arkansas - Little Rock (Little Rock AR)
University of Arkansas - Monticello (Monticello AR)
University of Arkansas - Pine Bluff (Pine Bluff AR)
University of Arkansas Community College - Batesville (Batesville AR)
University of Arkansas Community College - Hope (Hope AR)
University of Arkansas Community College - Morrillton (Morrillton AR)
University of Arkansas Medical Sciences (Little Rock AR)
University of Central Arkansas (Conway AR)

Louisiana Schools - 17
Bossier Parish Community College (Bossier City LA)
Centenary College (Shreveport LA)
Grambling State University (Grambling LA)
Louisiana College (Pineville LA)
Louisiana State University - Shreveport (Shreveport LA)
Louisiana State University - Baton Rouge (Baton Rouge LA)
Louisiana State University - Alexandria (Alexandria LA)
Louisiana Tech University (Ruston LA)
Loyola University (New Orleans LA)
Northwestern State University (Leesville LA)
Northwestern State University (Natchitoches LA)
Northwestern State University (Shreveport LA)
Southern State University & A&M College (Baton Rouge LA)
Southern State University & A&M College (Shreveport LA)
Tulane University (New Orleans LA)
University of Louisiana - Lafayette (Lafayette LA)
University of Louisiana - Monroe (Monroe LA)

TEXAS SCHOOLS - 19
Baylor University (Waco TX)
Blinn College (Brenham TX)
Dallas Baptist University (Dallas TX)
East Texas Baptist University (Marshall TX)
Houston Community College (Houston TX)
Lone Star College (The Woodlands TX)
Panola College (Carthage TX)
Prairie View A&M University (Prairie View TX)
Rice University (Houston TX)
Southern Methodist University (Dallas TX)
SW Assemblies of God University (Waxahachie TX)
Texas A&M University (College Station TX)
Texas Christian University (Fort Worth TX)
Texas State University (San Marcos TX)
Texas Woman’s University (Denton TX)
University of North Texas - (Dallas TX)
University of Texas (Austin TX)
Wiley College (Marshall TX)

MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS - 7
Alcorn State University (Alcorn MS)
Belhaven University (Jackson MS)
Delta State University (Cleveland MS)
Mississippi College (Clinton MS)
Mississippi State University (Starkville MS)
University of Mississippi (Oxford MS)

MISSOURI SCHOOLS - 8
Evangel University (Springfield MO)
Missouri State University (Springfield MO)
St. Louis University (St Louis MO)
State Fair Community College (Sedalia MO)
Southwest Baptist University (Bolivar MO)
University of Central Missouri (Warrensburg MO)
Washington University (St Louis MO)
Westminster College (Fulton MO)

UTAH SCHOOLS - 2
Brigham Young University (Provo UT)
Utah State University (Logan UT)

TENNESSEE SCHOOLS - 6
Belmont University (Nashville TN)
Middle Tennessee State University (Murfreesboro TN)
University of Memphis (Memphis TN)
Rhodes College (Memphis TN)
University of the South-Sewanee (Sewanee TN)
Vanderbilt University (Nashville TN)

ALABAMA SCHOOLS - 2
Auburn University (Auburn AL)
University of Alabama (Tuscaloosa AL)

KANSAS SCHOOLS - 4
Butler Community College (El Dorado KS)
McPherson College (McPherson KS)
Newman College (Wichita KS)
University of Kansas (Lawrence KS)

OKLAHOMA SCHOOLS - 6
East Oklahoma State College (Wilburton OK)
Oklahoma City Community College (Oklahoma City OK)
Oklahoma State University (Stillwater OK)
Oklahoma State University (Tulsa OK)
University of Oklahoma (Norman OK)
University of Tulsa (Tulsa OK)

GEORGIA SCHOOLS - 4
Clayton State University (Morrow GA)
Coastal Georgia Community College (Brunswick GA)
Emory University (Atlanta GA)
Savannah College of Art & Design (Savannah GA)

ILLINOIS SCHOOLS - 3
College of Lake County (Grayslake IL)
Lindenwood University - Belleville (Belleville IL)
Northeastern Illinois University (Chicago IL)

ARIZONA SCHOOLS - 1
Eastern Arizona College (Thatcher AZ)

OHIO SCHOOLS - 2
Case-Western Reserve University (Cleveland OH)
The Ohio State University (Columbus OH)

NEBRASKA SCHOOLS - 2
Central Community College (Grand Island NE)
University of Nebraska (Lincoln NE)

CALIFORNIA COLLEGES - 2
Chaffee College (Rancho Cucamonga CA)
Santa Monica College (Santa Monica CA)

MAINE SCHOOLS - 1
Central Maine Community College (Auburn ME)

COLORADO SCHOOLS - 1
Colorado State University (Fort Collins CO)

FLORIDA SCHOOLS - 2
Pensacola State University (Pensacola FL)
Stetson University (Deland FL)

IOWA SCHOOLS - 1
Cornell College (Mt Vernon IA)

NEW YORK SCHOOLS - 1
The Cooper Union (New York City NY)

RHODE ISLAND SCHOOLS - 1
Johnson & Wales University (Providence RI)

NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOLS - 1
North Carolina State University (Raleigh NC)

VIRGINIA SCHOOLS - 2
University of Virginia (Charlottesville VA)
Virginia Tech University (Blacksburg VA)

KENTUCKY SCHOOLS - 1
University of Kentucky (Lexington KY)

INDIANA SCHOOLS - 1
University of Notre Dame (Notre Dame IN)

PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOLS - 1
University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia PA)

WISCONSIN SCHOOLS - 1
University of Wisconsin-Parkside (Kenosha WI)

MARYLAND SCHOOLS - 1
US Naval Academy (Annapolis MD)

“I’m using the Promise to attend South Arkansas Community College right now, but I will transfer to Southern Arkansas University and will gain even more from the Promise there. The Promise goes where I want to go.”

– Brandon Tommy, EHS 2015, South Arkansas Community College

Alli Hegi Williams, EHS 2012
Ouachita Baptist University, 2016

Montana McAdams, EHS 2013
Ouachita Baptist University
both accepted to UAMS School of Pharmacy
Community Response / Improvements

The community response to the Promise has been overwhelming. In the days immediately following the announcement, there was a renewed energy in the community. As students, parents, small business owners, as well as, other large companies expressed their appreciation to Murphy Oil, they all began thinking of ways they could join the effort to strengthen the community.

Economic Development

An economic development tax was approved by the voters in April, after the announcement of the Promise in January. The vote to pass this one-cent sales tax showed the community’s enthusiasm to support the Promise through economic improvements in El Dorado. The initial tax was passed in 2007 and extended through 2014. Voters renewed the tax in 2015 showing their continued desire for economic development in the community.

A portion of the funds raised through the initial tax increase went toward building a multipurpose conference center designed on the campus of South Arkansas Community College (South Ark), which opened in 2011. The El Dorado Conference Center is a joint endeavor of the city of El Dorado and SouthArk and has a unique design reflective of the area’s oil and timber heritage.

In September of 2007, an additional millage was passed to build a new high school. This was the first millage increase in the city since the 1970s. El Dorado High School welcomed students to the new campus in the Fall of 2011.

Additionally, a new Arts and Entertainment District is being developed in downtown El Dorado, which promises to continue the revitalization of the community. El Dorado Festivals and Events has extensive plans to revitalize the downtown district and make El Dorado the entertainment hub of the south. The project will renovate four historic structures, create four performing arts venues, add restaurants, hotel space plus the largest outdoor playscape in the state. Completion of Phase One is expected in 2018.

Other businesses in El Dorado have also supported Murphy Oil’s effort to revitalize our community and school district by sponsoring additional programs for the students to extend the Promise culture throughout the district.
In May 2007, the El Dorado Education Foundation and El Dorado Public Schools held the first Academic Signing Day for EHS graduates, sponsored by First Financial Bank and others. Similar to a signing ceremony for students attending college on athletic scholarships, Academic Signing Day provides students an opportunity to sign a “letter of intent” to attend college to pursue academic excellence with the El Dorado Promise. Academic Signing Day has been held for each graduating class since the Promise was announced. The event has brought in highly-touted speakers, from former presidents, senators, governors and first ladies, to executive officers of NFL teams, and Fortune 500 companies.

Academic Signing Day Speakers
2007: Claiborne Deming, then President and CEO of Murphy Oil Corporation
2008: Ron Kitchens, then Executive Director of South West Michigan First and Kalamazoo Promise Board Member
2009: Dean Skip Rutherford, then Dean of the University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service
2010: President George W. Bush
2011: US Senator Mark Pryor
2012: President William J. Clinton
2013: Arkansas Senator Shane Broadway
2014: El Dorado Public Schools Superintendent Bob Watson (now retired)
2015: Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson
2016: Stephen Jones, COO and VP, Dallas Cowboys Football Club
Susan Hutchinson, Arkansas First Lady

“Every single year, at Academic Signing Day, when I see those kids walk in with the Promise cap and graduation gown, I get chills. It’s very moving to look at each class and realize, every one of them can go to college,”

– Bonnie Haynie, Federal Programs and Special Projects Director
Promise Backpacks for Kindergartners

The Promise changed the way students in the El Dorado School District look at college. It also changed when students in the district begin thinking about going to college. Since the inception of the Promise, each kindergarten student in the District receives a Promise Backpack, provided by Simmons Bank. The El Dorado Promise Director and others visit each kindergarten classroom on the first day of school to hand out the backpacks, tell students about the El Dorado Promise and teach them the famous Promise Cheer. Students begin hearing about their opportunity to attend the college of their choice on their first day of school.

Returning to the Promise

A group of Promise recipients have come full circle and have returned to the place where it all began. Ten EHS graduates, who received the El Dorado Promise and then completed their college degree, have returned to El Dorado to work in the school district. Bringing the Promise full circle provides a unique perspective for these Promise graduates.

Clair Antoon, EHS 2009; AP Literature, EHS
Sally Bennett, EHS 2010; Special Education, Hugh Goodwin Elementary
Tyler Compton, EHS 2010; Pre-AP English/Reading, Washington Middle School
Luke Landsdell, EHS 2010; Algebra I, EHS
Hannah Ponder, EHS 2012; First grade teacher, Yocum Primary School
Kelsey Smith, EHS 2008; Kindergarten teacher, Hugh Goodwin Elementary
Rachel Smith, EHS 2007; 8th grade math teacher, Barton Jr. High
Sylvia Washington, EHS 2008; Family & Consumer Science, EHS
Greg Crew, EHS 2012; College and Career Coach, EHS
Stephanie Thomas, EHS 2010; Family & Consumer Science, EHS

“I love that I had the opportunity to come back to El Dorado to teach. I look at it as my way of giving back to the community.”

– Clair Antoon, EHS 2009, Arkansas Tech University, 2013 EHS Teacher
“The Promise provides me a different perspective to share with my students. I’m able to give them a first-hand example of how much the El Dorado Promise has contributed to students in the past 10 years. Since the Promise has given so much to the students, I feel like by coming back as a teacher in El Dorado, I am able to give a contribution back to the community.” – Rachel Smith, EHS 2007, University of Arkansas 2012, Barton Junior High Teacher

“Going to college was always my expectation, but the Promise opened more opportunities for me. With the Promise, I was able to go out of state to college and attend Missouri State. Now, I’ve come back as a College and Career Coach and am working with EHS students who will receive the Promise. It’s very rewarding to be able to share my perspective with students who are where I was just a few years before.” -Greg Crew, EHS 2012, Missouri State University 2016

“The Promise put El Dorado on the map. When I would tell people that I’m from El Dorado they immediately said, ‘that’s where they have the Promise!’ I heard that so many times. It was wonderful, but I think they were jealous.”

-Feng Weng, EHS 2009, University of Arkansas 2013
I love the Promise because...

El Dorado School District students K-12 were asked why they loved the Promise. They responded with essays and artwork.

“With the Promise I know I can not only go to college, but I can go to the college of my choice.”

Emme Landes, El Dorado High School

“To me, the El Dorado Promise is a chance. It’s a chance to go to college to be whatever I want to be. The promise has granted me a chance to be my dream, a speech pathologist.”

Reaves Robinson, El Dorado High School

“The El Dorado Promise Scholarship has given the students the reason to believe in a good future. I believe that it has changed many lives for graduates and their families. The Promise means a sense of relief that you can get there someday.”

Evinn Roblee, El Dorado High School

“The Possibilities are Endless”

Kate Vernon, El Dorado High School

“The El Dorado Promise is a gift that will help me finish college.”

Lynley Smith, Washington Middle School

“I love the Promise because it will help me finish college!”

Caroline Byrd, Washington Middle School

“With the Promise I can not only go to college, but I can go to the college of my choice.”

Avrey Davison, Washington Middle School

“We Can Thanks to the Promise”

Lenna Roblee, El Dorado High School
“The Promise allows me to reach for the stars and to follow my dreams.”
Hannah Watson, El Dorado High School

“The Promise to me is a secure future. It is the foot that holds the door open to our future.”
Jordan Norman, El Dorado High School

“I love the Promise because my mom wouldn’t be able to send me and my sisters to college because we are one year apart, and she can’t afford that. The Promise means to me, a better education that I could afford and I can do what I want and not settle. I grew up knowing about the Promise because I’ve always thought of it as a way to do what I want.”
Antonia Miles, El Dorado High School

“I love the Promise because my mom wouldn’t be able to send me and my sisters to college because we are one year apart, and she can’t afford that. The Promise means to me, a better education that I could afford and I can do what I want and not settle. I grew up knowing about the Promise because I’ve always thought of it as a way to do what I want.”
Kevin Beeman, Washington Middle School
The El Dorado Promise celebrated its tenth anniversary in January 2017. The community marked the occasion with several events and festivities. The School District hosted “Promise Week” throughout the District, which included Honor Day, which honored all District staff; College Day which had the entire town clad in college t-shirts and college recruiters visiting the middle, junior high and high schools; Career Day which brought guest speakers into the schools to talk about how college afforded them the opportunity to pursue their careers. The week culminated with a community pep rally at the courthouse.

Ten years is a significant milestone. Ten years means that the seniors of 2017 were in second grade when the Promise was announced. They probably weren’t thinking about what college they would go to at that point, but the Promise was making sure that they could go when the time came.

Ten years means that the first Promise Class will celebrate their ten-year high school reunion in the summer 2017. No doubt many of them will return to El Dorado, they will reconnect with high school friends, reminisce about their high school memories, reflect on how their lives were then and how they have changed. And they will remember that day, January 22, 2007, when they were called to a special assembly in the school gymnasium. It was then that they were told that they were receiving a gift – a gift of $50 million – to share with their classmates and underclassmen and students who would come after them. A gift that would change their future plans. A gift that would change their lives. A gift that would change El Dorado. A gift that continues to reap rewards for them ten years later.

The El Dorado Promise has done so much for me and my future already. Without the promise, I wouldn’t have had the opportunity to pick where I went to school. I would’ve also had to get a job while in college to help pay for my dues. The Promise allowed me to fulfill my dreams of furthering my education. The Promise has truly been a blessing to not only me, but to my family as well. My family would not be able to afford for me to go to the University of Arkansas, where I currently attend. I wouldn’t be able to get my degree in Physical Education and help shape the lives of the future young men and women in our society. Although I wasn’t able to fulfill my 3rd grade dreams of being in the NFL, I plan on helping others chase their dreams of playing college sports and furthering their education. I am truly blessed to have grown up in El Dorado and experienced the Promise. I am also thankful for Murphy Oil for doing such a good deed for all the young people in our community.”

-John Sixbey, EHS, 2016, University of Arkansas

“The Promise will help me pay for my undergraduate degree so I can use the money my parents have saved for my college to help pay for medical school.”

– Anna Dear, EHS 2017, accepted to University of Arkansas
Thank You

Thank you El Dorado School District Students for taking the Promise and pursuing your goals, for working hard through school to prepare for the Promise.

Thank you El Dorado School District Teachers, Administrators, School Board and Staff for meeting the challenge of the Promise by providing more rigorous curriculum for our students, for creating a “college-going culture” in our District and for encouraging your students to be prepared to accept the Promise.

Thank you EHS graduates for using the Promise as it was intended; for accepting it and pursuing your goals of going to college.

Thank you Promise Scholars for keeping the Promise and continuing to use it to better yourselves.

Thank you Promise graduates for staying the course and finishing the race, for using the full potential of the Promise and claiming your college degree.

Thank you parents and families of EHS students for being a part of this district and encouraging your students to take the Promise and achieve great things.

Thank you El Dorado for rallying with Murphy Oil Corporation to make El Dorado a community of Promise.

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- Jasmine Thurston, EHS 2008, University of Arkansas 2013

“Thank you El Dorado Promise for making a difference and a lasting impact!”

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“The El Dorado Promise opens up endless opportunities for our students. It gives them the opportunity to pursue the dreams they have.”

– Jim Tucker, Superintendent El Dorado Public Schools