

# MAKING THE CONNECTION

## A New Vision for Aligned Advising



K-12, higher education, and third-party organizations provide an intentionally connected system of timely support to help students seamlessly progress to and through postsecondary education and training and remove barriers that stand in their way.



These systems prioritize resources and support for low-income students, students of color, and first-generation students to address deeply-embedded systemic inequities.



Through aligned advising, students develop the knowledge, skills, and social capital to make informed academic and career decisions, attain a postsecondary credential of value, and thrive in life.

## Pave the Path to Support

**Own the Handoff**



**Unlock Alignment at Scale**



**KEY LEVERS TO ALIGN ADVISING**

## Create an equity-driven plan for aligned advising.

- **Set a vision and goals for both postsecondary and career attainment.** Through unified system goals and mutually reinforcing measures of success, leaders can demonstrate their focus on and commitment to smoothing student transitions. This starts with a common vision for success—defined through shared goals—and a joint approach for articulating a shared sense of urgency.
- **Put someone in charge, and define responsibilities across stakeholders.** The communities that have demonstrated the greatest gains in postsecondary access and success have given someone the time, capacity, authority and accountability to lead the aligned advising efforts. That individual can and should operate as a harbor master to expand partnerships and coordinate activities.
- **Communicate the economic and moral imperative.** A postsecondary credential is the best path to economic opportunity for individuals and positively contributes to the economic, civil, and social goals of the nation, states, communities. Our expectations for educational attainment should not end with a high school diploma.

## Open the table for collaboration.

- **Convene all relevant stakeholders.** With strong partnerships—among students and families, educators, counselors, administrators, community organizations, and policymakers—and deep alignment between K-12, postsecondary, and workforce, progress can be made.
- **Ensure student and family voices are elevated.** The individuals most directly affected by the programmatic and policy efforts to align advising across sectors should have a hand in co-creating solutions locally and statewide.
- **Build structures for ongoing collaboration.** Collaboration cannot be happenstance; clear structures and routines need to be in place to ensure that this work remains a priority. The collaboration must be inclusive, grounded in data, and focused on eliminating structural barriers and targeting major gaps.

## Hold systems accountable.

- **Build incentives and support structures for prioritizing advising.** State and/or local high school accountability structures should be based, in part, on students' successful enrollment in postsecondary education and training. Alternatively, states can implement outcomes-based funding for high schools, like Texas has with [HB 3](#), to prioritize student success beyond high school.
- **Organize and integrate capacity, funding, data, and existing initiatives.** A common, coordinated plan can bring about coherence and focus to the work across sectors and stakeholders. And it can provide actors with clarity about timelines, roles, and responsibilities that can work toward sustainable structures and investments.
- **Define the key student, counselor, and system actions.** It is necessary to clearly articulate the procedural steps that students need to complete to prepare for and successfully transition to and through higher education; specify how counselors, advisors, and college access organizations can tailor their support around those steps; and, provide appropriate resources, capacity, and enabling conditions to prioritize those activities.
- **Track, publicly report, and disseminate progress and disaggregated outcomes.** Educators, administrators, policymakers, and the public all need insight into how well students—especially students of color, low-income students, and first-generation college students—are progressing to and through postsecondary education and training. [The Momentum Metrics](#) provide a solid foundation upon which to start.

# Pave the Path to Support

## Eliminate friction.

- **Prioritize early postsecondary opportunities.** Students who participate in dual credit, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and acquire high-quality industry-recognized credentials are more likely to enroll and persist in postsecondary education and training. And yet students are too often unaware of, are counseled away from, or face systemic barriers to accessing these opportunities. K-12 and higher education must bring a common voice in advising students to participate in these experiences, and ensuring that the opportunities exist.
- **Simplify postsecondary access and financial processes.** Direct admissions can take the complexity out of the application process by automatically offering admissions to any student who qualifies. Similar approaches to create a common statewide application or simplify the Federal Application for Free Student Aid (FAFSA) and financial aid award letters can also open the doors of higher education wider for first-generation college students, low-income students, and students of color.
- **Renovate the first year college experience.** Postsecondary institutions that have revised their advising approaches to be sustained, strategic, integrated, proactive, and personalized ([SSIPP](#)) have demonstrated increased student outcomes. Similarly, guided pathway reforms that better organize and structure student course taking from enrollment, paired with intentional advising support, have been shown to improve retention and attainment.

## Use data to empower.

- **Link critical data on students' plans, progress, and supports across systems.** K-12 and higher education systems need to link and share data--and to do so beyond outcomes data. That may mean accessing students' state-required academic and career plans, leveraging electronic transcripts to better understand a students' portfolios of experiences, providing early insight to the services and supports students' receive in high school, and maximizing the use of predictive analytics to target early interventions.
- **Enable data sharing with all relevant stakeholders, including students.** Having a common platform for organizing, tiering, and tracking direct student supports can increase impact and expand scale across multiple actors. Project WIN in Boston brings together five organizations around a common set of data to coordinate advising efforts, which has led to increases in student support and outcomes.
- **Identify and address equity gaps. Advising should be an entitlement, not enrichment.** And yet, for many students of color and low-income students, access to high-quality postsecondary advising is limited at best, nonexistent at worst. Examining disaggregated data can illuminate where additional support is needed.
- **Power proactive advising to provide targeted support.** Many higher education institutions have begun to leverage the power of large data sets on student progress to better streamline and target advising assistance. Georgia State's [GPS Advising](#) system alerts advisors when students fall off track based on historical data of student progress toward a credential, allowing for immediate, proactive support. The institutional graduation rates have improved by seven percentage points since launch, with the largest gains from students of color and low-income students.

## Spur college and career identity.

- **Expect early and ongoing college and career exploration and planning.** The formation of occupational interests and identity is a process, not an event. It should begin early in a students' career, and system actors should recognize the role that multiple actors play in supporting that process. Colorado has created a "[Career Conversations](#)" resource to help multiple actors structure these conversations.

- **Catalyze opportunities for building social capital through mentorship and exposure.** Students' relationships and their ability to activate them are both critical factors in efforts to define, and ultimately achieve, their academic and career goals. Research is clear that the development of social capital, through relationships and networks, is fundamental for building confidence, identity, and agency – all of which contribute to their long-term success.
- **Scale alumni supports.** Districts and college access organizations can and should think beyond just advising for postsecondary access. In addition to higher education support, communities should create targeted alumni advising for first-generation students, like DC Persists, so that they continue to have a helping hand as they navigate their first-year.

## Catalyze capacity.

- **Reimagine advising as a process that extends beyond school years and across systems.** Most counselor contracts do not extend through the summer, yet in many communities, more than 20 percent of students leave high school planning to enroll in higher education and never show up at the end of summer. States and institutions need novel approaches to bridge advising support across K-12 and higher education to freeze “summer melt,” whether through extending high school counselor contracts, placing college advisors in high schools to follow students through summer, or leveraging outside advising organizations to ensure a successful hand-off between systems.
- **Maximize internal capacity by shifting and expanding who does advising across K-12 and higher education.** Many individuals in schools and colleges beyond counselors and advisors have a role to play in supporting students' postsecondary access and success. And many of the duties assigned to counselors and advisors go beyond helping students prepare for and successfully transition to and through postsecondary education and training.
- **Build capacity with external partners.** College access organizations, higher education institutions, community organizations, and many others have a role to play as a force maximizer for engagement with students. States and districts need to support expanded partnerships so that more students can receive the assistance they need and deserve.
- **Align counselor training and certification around college and career readiness.** Formal counselor training rarely includes a deep dive into postsecondary access activities. Some states, including Tennessee, have worked to redefine counselor expectations, placing a greater emphasis on the knowledge and abilities to support students' preparation for postsecondary education and training.



# Unlock Alignment at Scale

## Invest for success.

- **Create new funding streams for advising that span systems.** For instance, Tennessee has a line item to support AdviseTN, which employs a cadre of advisors to help students complete key procedural steps on the path to postsecondary education and training.
- **Incent the highest-leverage advising practices.** Many state higher education systems have invested in institutional implementation of guided pathways reforms that revise student advising from matriculation.
- **Dedicate funds to increasing boots on the ground.** The federal stimulus investment in states, districts, and AmeriCorps presents a significant opportunity for maximizing cross-sector capacity to support students.

## Leverage key learnings.

- **Activate communities of practice.** School, district, and postsecondary institutional leaders can and should learn from their peers who are showing what's possible around advising reform. States should launch or seed the development of networks for learning and sharing.
- **Codify and disseminate promising practices and resources.** A single agency or organization should be responsible for collecting and sharing information on what needs to be done, how it can be done, and communities or organizations that are leading the way.
- **Provide training on key advising practices and data tools.** State agencies have a responsibility to ensure that practitioners have the training necessary to maximize the tools available to support students.

## Establish a research and development agenda.

- **Explore how to differentiate models for different community and population needs.** States can help facilitate research partnerships to better understand what tools and support have the greatest impact in different settings and among individuals with diverse needs. This is especially important for understanding whether and how to scale successful advising models or technology tools, recognizing that even things like “procedural nudges” that work in specific settings, may not have the same impact when implemented at a larger scale.
- **Define and measure social capital.** It is clear that who you know plays a fundamental role in students' progression to and through higher education and into the workforce. Yet, research remains nascent on how best to measure social capital and ways to support students' growth. As more energy is directed at aligning advising across sectors, there is a great opportunity to prioritize further research about the role of relationships and networks in student success.
- **Determine the balance of support from technology versus human capital.** The rise of virtual advising platforms, chatbots, and texting campaigns has had positive impacts on the scale of advising supports. But, these and other technology tools are not an advising silver bullet. At the end of the day, what matters most in advising is the one-to-one interaction. Determining when and how to use technology to expand engagement is a key role for states and communities to play into the future.

