Advising at Scale: For Funders

Equitable Postsecondary Advising Systems
Expanding access to help close the degree divide

OVERVIEW

Postsecondary education dramatically increases the likelihood of employment and economic success. This is true for elite colleges, other four-year institutions, and community colleges. But many young people, especially those furthest from opportunity and from the most underserved communities, are not accessing postsecondary pathways or realizing the benefits that come with a degree. To disrupt this inequity, we must better support students to identify, pursue, and complete college, thereby improving their life trajectory.

Quality postsecondary advising — equipping students to identify and evaluate their full set of postsecondary options and to select and successfully pursue the best option for them — is one critical lever for closing the degree divide.

A Common Vision:

All high school students equitably receive high-quality postsecondary advising that results in a successful transition to college and career

CHARACTERISTICS OF ADVISING SYSTEMS THAT MEET THE NEEDS OF ALL STUDENTS

Equitable: Advising supports are tiered and differentiated such that all students receive supports that meet their specific needs

High-quality: Well-trained advisers provide information and assistance to students using resources, curricula, tools, and delivery models that have been demonstrated to be effective

Measurable: Advising meaningfully contributes to and accelerates student progress toward measurable postsecondary outcomes

Aligned to college and career: Supports enable the exploration of multiple pathways to achieving postsecondary success, including a range of college and career options

Financially sustainable: The ongoing costs of delivering supports are primarily covered by public revenue and are not dependent on philanthropy

CONDITIONS REQUIRED TO CREATE EXPAND ACCESS TO THESE SYSTEMS

Our field research suggests that most K-12 systems are relatively early in figuring out how to best deliver postsecondary advising supports. To significantly expand advising access, districts — with the partnership of college access organizations, policymakers, funders and other supporters — must focus on creating six conditions for success.

Case for Change

Build broad support for postsecondary success as a unifying purpose of the core work of K-12

Vision & Milestones

Create a shared district vision for postsecondary outcomes and a strategy to achieve the key milestones that students must reach to successfully navigate postsecondary pathways

Data & Platforms

Use data to understand student needs — prioritizing milestones and which student needs to address — and to track student outcomes

Supports — Content, Coverage, & Delivery

Identify the internal supports and resources available and how/whether to leverage outside supports

Coordination & Continuous Improvement

Identify partners, establish staffing models, and define roles in order to optimize the provision of services, reducing duplication and ensuring coordination

Resources

Identify and secure adequate and sustainable financial resources

FOR MORE INFORMATION bit.ly/PostSecondaryAccess

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CRITICAL STRATEGIES FOR PROVIDING POSTSECONDARY ADVISING SUPPORTS

Support the development of the next generation of comprehensive models

Funders should support CAOs, in partnership with local districts, to pilot innovative new models to support district and student needs in more efficient and effective ways. These pilots could follow a structured, multiyear process to test and improve strategies and share learnings across the field.

Disseminate leading practices and models

Organizations across the country are investing in elements of this work and trying to address the challenges in pockets. The field would benefit from increased communication, not only within ecosystems but also across ecosystems to ensure the sharing of best practices and reduction of duplication of efforts.

Support local ecosystems to assess needs and develop aligned plans

A needs assessment can help a K-12 system — and its partners — understand strengths and gaps and identify the most critical needs to deepen college advising work. Philanthropy can support the development of needs assessment frameworks and tools that can be used by ecosystem actors in communities across the country. Local funders can also support efforts to convene local actors to complete a needs assessment and to collaboratively plan for how to address gaps and accelerate progress.

Select Recommendations for Funders to Accelerate Progress

Case for Change

- Help offset cost of launching college advising teams (e.g., director of college advising)
- Convene the ecosystem players to foster conversations that increase focus on the case for change

Vision & Milestones

- Support CAOs and districts in developing and aligning around a common set of milestones
- Promote and disseminate best practices (e.g., FAFSA graduation requirements) to accelerate milestone development

Data & Platforms

- Support development of data infrastructure to track access/success indicators across systems, build connections between actors (like K-12 and higher ed), and identify an entity to be the holder of the data
- Fund support for districts to do a robust assessment of student and district outcomes to better understand the current state, identify priorities, seek solutions

Supports — Content, Coverage, & Delivery

- Provide funding to design, scale, and disseminate turnkey resources aligned to milestones and provide implementation training to districts
- Invest in pilots of innovative, lighter-touch approaches (e.g., tech-enabled, remote, lighter touch, lower dosage tailored to student need)

Coordination & Continuous Improvement

- Stand up a coordinating body (either within a district or through a third-party organization) to ensure collaboration, communication, and optimization of services
- Incentivize exploration of CAO collaborations and/or formal partnerships to improve efficiency and reduce service gaps

Resources

- Invest seed funding in districts to help catalyze case for change and build internal capacity
- Provide access to more patient capital that empowers CAOs to take risks and fail in order to innovate/learn more quickly

Access the full research report, including additional strategies and recommendations aligned to the six conditions, here.