

This research project was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Thank you for your continued support of Washington state students and communities.

WA College and Career Advising Field Assessment

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Purpose

This report was prepared for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation by Kinetic West. Kinetic West was asked to investigate the enabling conditions that support strong college and career advising for Washington state students and understand how Washington state is performing relative to those areas.



Key questions for this project

What components must be in place to support an equitable and effective advising system for all Washington students?

Where in Washington do these components exist? How strong are they? Where should they develop?

How can various stakeholders of education, including communities, school districts, state agencies and philanthropy strengthen the field of advising in Washington?

Project Components

College and Career Advising Framework:

- Outlines key components of effective and equitable college and career advising
- Builds on Gates Foundation US Program's work

Current State of WA's College and Career Advising Report:

- Analysis of statewide district, school and CBO survey respondents on college and career vision, staffing, partnerships, curriculum, data and equity practices.
- College and career advising workforce analysis
- Deep dives on best practice districts and national leaders in college and career advising
- Recommendations for advancing college and career advising in Washington

Research Team & Advisory Committee

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How we defined “College and Career Advising”

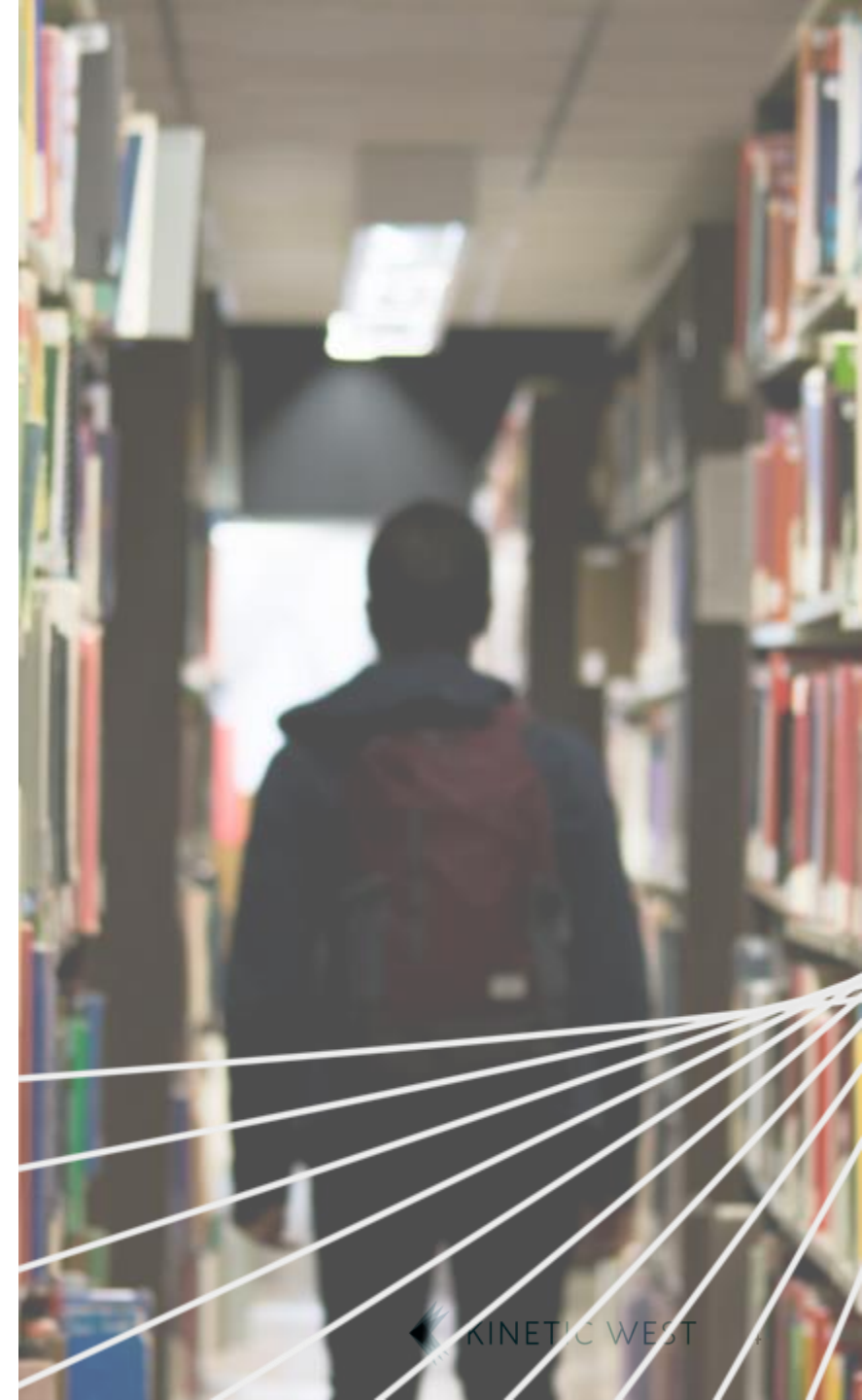
College and Career Advising in this project means...

Structured support to help a student define, attain, and complete college and career goals (i.e. not general mentorship), including the organized delivery of the following types of supports:

- College and career awareness and exploration
- College and career pathway selection advising
- College or postsecondary program application support – including financial aid counseling
- High school to college or postsecondary program transition support
- College or postsecondary program persistence support
- Career skills training for students

This research is focused on...

- Advising that leads students toward a degree, industry-recognized certification, or other stackable credential offered by an accredited university, community and technical college, apprenticeship, or training program
- How to improve the relational work of college and career advising, rather than the transactional tools (checklists, trackers, etc.) that advisors use to support students
- Washington state students, particularly improving college and career advising for Black, Latino, and Indigenous students; students from low-income backgrounds; and rural students
- The wide range of partners and providers that can support advising which might include counselors, teachers, community-based organizations, coaches, or other partners in local communities



Why “College and Career Advising”

An overwhelming majority of students, across all subgroups, aspire to complete some form of postsecondary education. But many never enroll, and among those who do, too few obtain a degree or credential, with substantial gaps across income levels and racial and ethnic groups.¹

- Universally, Black and Latino high school students report aspiring to achieve financial stability, personal autonomy, and the ability to make meaningful contributions to their communities – aspirations which are closely tied to postsecondary education and training. Still, nationwide only 60% of Black and Latino high school graduates immediately transition into a postsecondary program, compared with 70% of their white peers.²
- Specific to Washington State, while 86% of students in the class of 2021 graduated from high school, only 50% enrolled in a postsecondary program, and only 40% are projected to attain a postsecondary credential by the age of 26.²

Research tells us that advising which places a student in a consistent relationship with access to a trusted and/or well-trained adult can help turn these statistics around.

- Students from low-income families have been found to have the greatest need for advising, but the least access to counselors and advisors.⁵
- School counselor interventions related to college have been found to be a form of “student social capital”⁶ – influencing not just whether a student enrolls in a postsecondary program, but whether a student chooses a program that is a good fit for their skills and future goals.⁷
- Advising interventions do not have to be limited to just the designated school counselor to be impactful – effective advising can come from any trusted adult who makes a student feel “acknowledged, listened to, and valued for who they are”.⁷
- Among students whose parents had a high school diploma or less, 74% attended college within 3 years of high school graduation if they had met with a counselor about college in high school, compared to 49% of those who did not meet with a counselor about college.⁸

Research Inputs

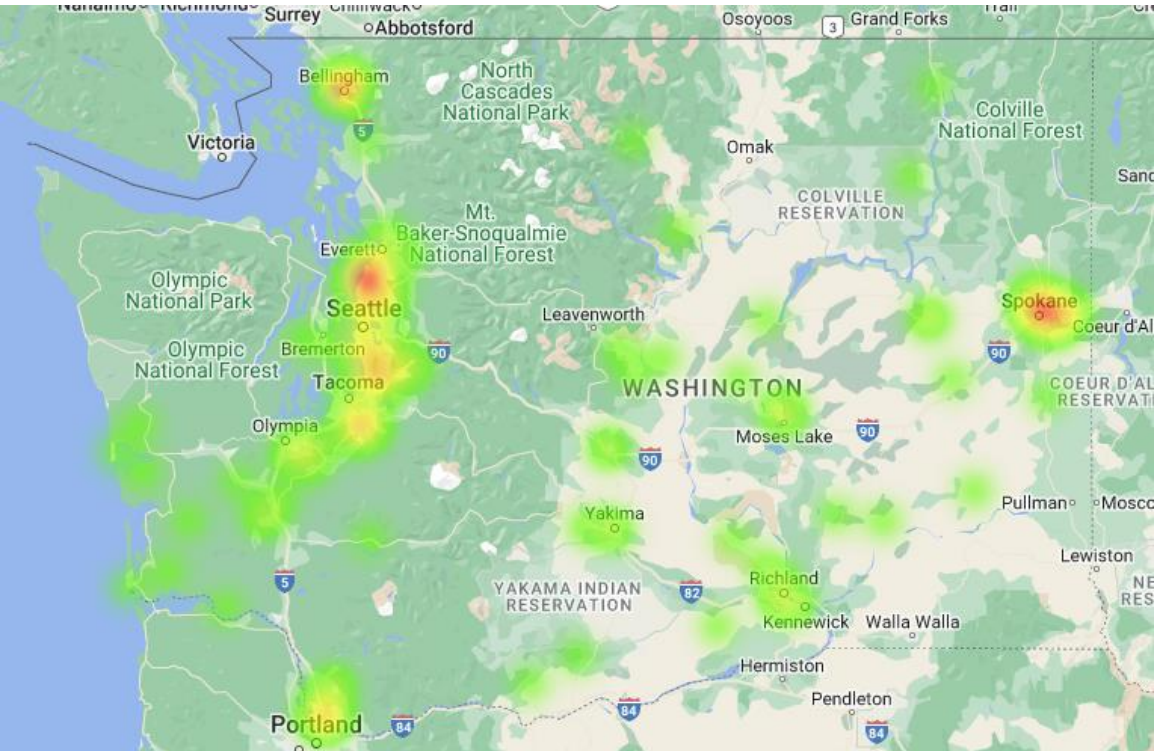
Interviews: National and Local Promising Practices	Interviews Conducted (National + WA)
	18 (10+8)

Surveys: District and Partner	Survey Responses (District + CBO)
	154 (129+25)

Desk Research: Framework	Frameworks Reviewed
	43

Desk Research: Workforce	Job Descriptions Analyzed
	34+

Map of survey respondent locations



70 school districts across 25 counties participated in the survey

Note: 143 individuals responded to the district survey, however, middle school respondents were removed from the analysis for consistency of findings. Similarly, 29 individuals responded to the CBO and higher education partner survey, however, duplicate respondents from the same program were removed from analysis.

Framework for effective and equitable college and career advising in Washington State



Vision

District and school level leaders are committed to a shared, resourced vision for students' college and career success



Curriculum

School leaders deliver student-informed college and career advising curriculum to every student from 6-12th grade



Staffing

District and school level staff have the time, budget, and training to execute their shared vision



Data

District and school leaders have data tracking tools that allow real-time and in-time interventions for district, schools, and students



Partnerships

District and schools build impactful, sustainable partnerships to equitably support all students with college and career advising



Equitable supports

College and career advising is available to every student, is inclusive of all career and higher education pathways. Students define, explore, and develop a plan around their specific post-high school interests, and students, families, and communities share feedback that is regularly used to help college and career advising improve.

From our research: State of the field of advising in Washington (I/II)

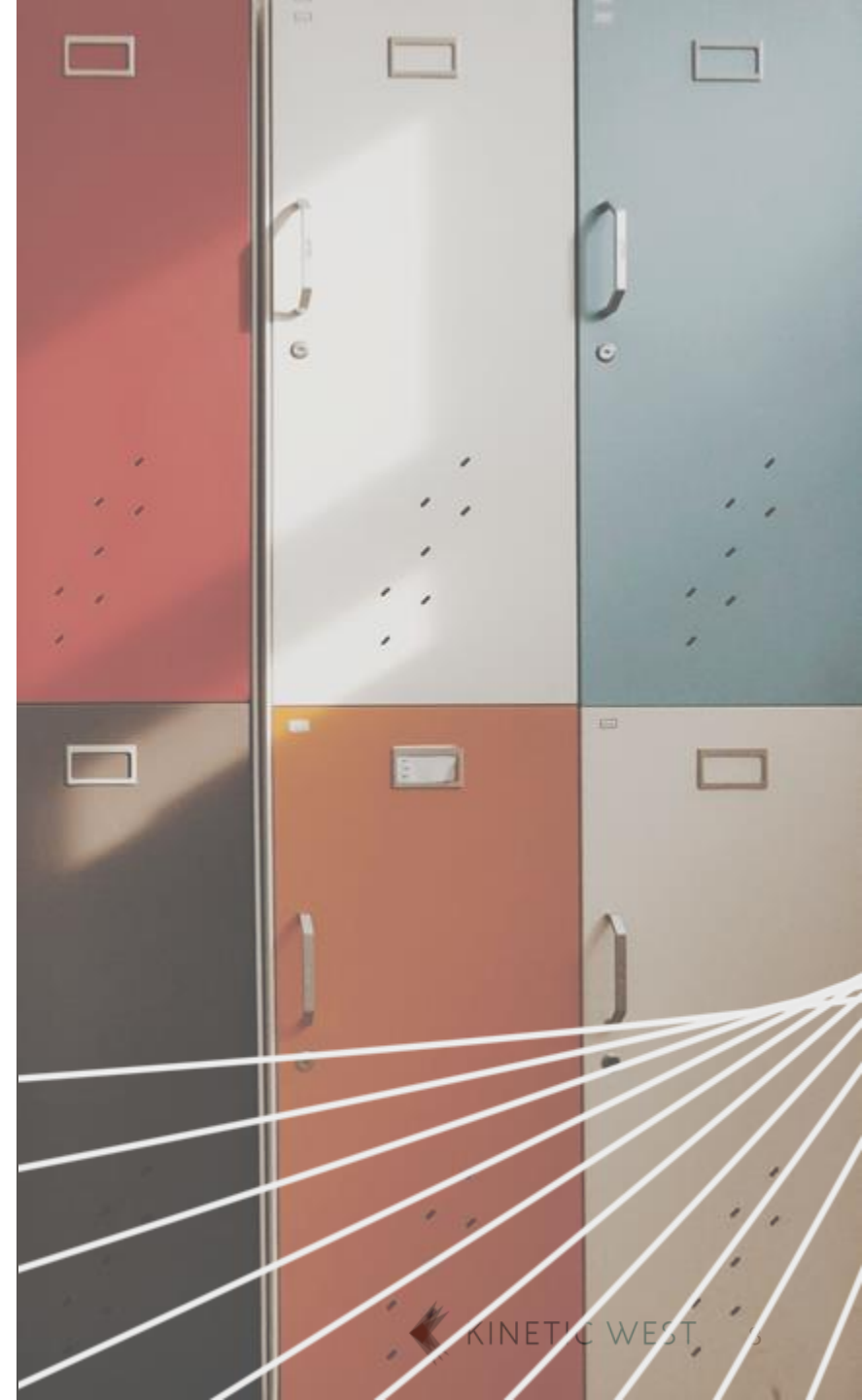
College and career advising in Washington state is acknowledged as critically important by schools, districts, students, families and communities

But there is significant inconsistency across the advising field – both between districts, and school to school within districts – when it comes to the major elements of college and career advising, which are:

- Setting a clear vision and goals
- Staffing and resourcing to execute the vision
- Identifying curriculum to use
- Accessing and utilizing partnerships
- Tracking data and progress

There has been little holistic guidance for districts, schools, and communities on “what good looks like” – especially when compared to other fields of education like CTE, school counseling, or core subject teaching and learning

Schools and districts, along with CBO partners, are innovating to meet the needs of students, but would benefit from more statewide support



From our research: State of the field of advising in Washington (II/II)

Washington state's college and career advising field is comprised primarily of certified school counselors, supported in larger districts by dedicated district-level college and career readiness leadership

- By state law, districts must now create and implement a comprehensive school counseling program that clarifies the school counselor role. The program must address students social/emotional, academic, and career development. These plans are just beginning to be rolled out by school districts and they vary in how deeply they address college and career advising

College and Career Specialists – a non-standardized school-level role; programs like GEAR UP, TRIO, and AVID; and community-based college access supports are also an important part of the advising system, but not all schools or districts have access to them

State-provided college and career planning resources exist, but advisors are also using a wide-range of bespoke training and professional development tools depending on their budget and capacities

Teachers and other school-based adults who interact with students regularly are not trained to help them navigate conversations about their future options, and counselor workloads rarely allow them to support every student

Advising can often end up looking like what a school or district has the capacity to do, rather than reflecting what students or families say they need, or following what national best practice would recommend

The High School and Beyond Plan, a Washington State graduation requirement, has long been a backbone of advising, but has implementation has not been well-resourced at the state or local levels. New investments will be bringing a statewide digital platform for the High School and Beyond Plan and a vision to transform it into a tool for more comprehensive advising

College and career advising is much less formalized and structured as a field than CTE education

Career and Technical Education	College and Career Advising
Separate program with dedicated staff and leadership	In most schools and districts, part of high school counseling, which also includes mental health support, scheduling, etc.
In high school, CTE concentrators take a series of courses in their career pathway; extensive courses are offered at school and skills centers	In most schools it is an elective, addressed in brief advisory or homeroom sessions, or left to the student to schedule time with counselor
Course and program standards in state code, require OSPI approval	No standardized statewide courses – some schools offer coursework, but it is bespoke
Federal funding, technical assistance provided through Carl D. Perkins Act	Federal funding for programs like GEAR UP and TRIO, but not available at every district
Statewide standardized career clusters and pathways	Large variety of state-provided, non-profit, and for-profit information sources
Standardized career pathway courses and curriculum for high-quality CTE programs such as CorePlus available statewide for certain disciplines	Career Guidance Washington provides lessons for students in Grades 6-12, but is not frequently updated or widely used based on research findings
Career Connect Washington statewide coalition funding new programs, networks between existing programs	Statewide organizations exist but not at the same scale and scope as CCW
Regional skills centers providing facilities and programs across districts to minimize duplication	Districts – especially those with college and career specialists – may form their own learning networks, but there is no resource sharing system similar to skill centers
Formal teaching positions with certified faculty	Mix of formal defined roles (school counselor, college and career readiness director) and informal roles (college and career specialist, CBO staffer) with range of certifications and training

Summary of research into the college and career advising field in WA



Vision

Districts and schools have a vision for postsecondary success, but struggle to track progress against goals and lack spaces to discuss strategies with peers



Curriculum

College and career advising curriculum is starting early, but it's less clear if it's impacting students effectively, incorporating student voice



Staffing

Advising capacity is limited by shortage of training, time, and partners inside and outside of schools



Data

Access to online college and career advising platforms, as well as real-time student data to track college and career progress across partners, is not consistently available to all schools



Partnerships

Community-based organizations and higher education institutions are essential partners for college and career advising – but not all schools or districts have access to them



Equitable supports

The field of advising in Washington has wide variation in the time, quality, and support available to students, depending on the capabilities, location, and budget of their school or district

Research Takeaways: Vision and Staffing



Vision

Districts and schools have a vision for postsecondary success, but struggle to track progress against goals and lack spaces to discuss strategies with peers

- Advising leads – particularly at the school-level – may not have access to or know how to access quality postsecondary outcomes data
- Even when survey respondents said they were familiar with their postsecondary enrollment outcomes, their answers differed from statewide datasets, especially for those working at the school-level



Staffing

Advising capacity is limited by shortage of training, time, and partners inside and outside of schools

- Only survey respondents from the largest districts reported having a specific college and career advising lead. In many districts, the lead is the high school counselor, who also holds many other responsibilities
- Advisors use WSAC and OSPI resources for learning and training, but also a wide variety of bespoke materials
- If a district can afford it, a college and career specialist provides critical augmentation to advising, as do partnerships like GEAR UP and TRIO
- It is not typical for all school staff to be trained to speak to basic advising topics – the counselor is the main person who sees it as “their job”
- Advising leads struggle to find time during the school day to help students with advising and provide consistent support
- Community-based organization (CBO) partners supporting advising tend to be much more highly trained, but are paid significantly less than their school or district counterparts

Research Takeaways: Partnerships and Curriculum



Partnerships

Community-based organizations and higher education institutions are essential partners for college and career advising – but not all schools or districts have access to them

- CBO/higher-ed partners help with augmenting staff capacity, offering tools, trips, and trainings to enrich the advising experience, and providing deeper outreach and individualized support to specific communities, including supporting family outreach efforts
- However, districts and schools can struggle to track enrollment and outcomes from CBO partner programs, and to set clearly defined roles with their CBO partners
- CBO partners are also not evenly distributed statewide. Districts and schools close to universities, colleges, or urban areas with high density of advising nonprofits benefit more. Rural districts and schools benefit less



Curriculum

College and career advising curriculum is starting early, but it's less clear if it's impacting students effectively, incorporating student voice

- Most survey respondents said they provide weekly or quarterly college and career advising content to students starting between 7th and 9th grade – but that content can vary from a class or field trip to an email or e-newsletter
- Most school-level respondents were unsure if their district has a college and career advising curriculum
- Tailoring college and career advising curriculum to specific population needs largely focuses on language access, College Bound eligibility, prioritizing focus populations (e.g. first-generation students) for opportunities, and/or working with students to create personalized advising plans
- School and district-level respondents do not see student voice as guiding their college and career advising curriculum, while CBOs strongly leverage student voice in guiding their programs

Research Takeaways: Data and Equitable Supports



Data

Access to online college and career advising platforms, as well as real-time student data to track college and career progress across partners, is not consistently available to all schools

- There is not a single college and career advising platform used by all – or even most – schools and districts
- The largest schools report using online platforms for college and career advising the most
- Less than half of school and district survey respondents knew if they had a data sharing agreement in place with their CBO partners. Only about a quarter of CBOs with data sharing agreements are accessing High School and Beyond Plan data



Equitable Supports

The field of advising in Washington has wide variation in the time, quality, and support available to students, depending on the capabilities, location, and budget of their school or district

- Schools and districts are not confident they are including student voice in their college and career advising efforts.
- Schools struggle to obtain and sustain funding for college and career specialists, who are important for supporting college and career advising success
- It is mostly larger schools that have access to online college and career platforms
- Partnerships with community-based organizations are critical for giving students exposure to career opportunities, engaging with focus communities, and supporting family engagement – but these partnerships are disproportionately available in urban areas

Summary of recommendations for strengthening the field of college and career advising in Washington



Vision

- Recognize and reward completion of high-value, industry-recognized credentials and postsecondary enrollment achievement



Staffing

- Provide more trusted resources for training and clock hour-eligible professional development for college & career advisors and “101-level” training for school-wide staff
- Advocate for at least one college and career specialist in each high school, formalize the specialist role within the education system



Partnerships

- Develop college and career advising partnerships in rural areas, including virtual options



Curriculum

- Develop college and career advising curriculum that blends with core subjects
- Create a statewide common college and career climate survey with analysis support, to incorporate student voice into advising programs and track impact of advising efforts



Data

- Align on a single statewide online college and career advising platform that integrates curriculum and data collection (e.g. transcripts, HSBP steps, career pathways, labor market data etc.)
- Create model data-sharing agreements that districts can adopt with all CBO partners, including sharing outcomes and HSBP data



Equitable supports

Expand investment in high school and beyond planning, including staffing support, curriculum development, and data collection into new statewide platform; Support funding of post-high school summer transition roles

Deep Dive: Recommendations (I/X)



Vision

Recognize and reward improvements to the rates of students attaining high-value, industry-recognized credentials and/or enrolling in postsecondary education

Why this recommendation?

- WA districts have a general postsecondary enrollment or readiness goal for students, but most lack the ability to regularly track progress toward their goal or forums to collaborate on best practices with peer districts/schools. There is little incentive to change the status quo, as districts who do an excellent job with postsecondary enrollment receive no particular benefit or recognition and postsecondary outcomes are not a factor in evaluating teachers or administrators
- We recommend advocating for funding to reward districts that do well on meeting postsecondary enrollment milestones (inclusive of credential earning, apprenticeship pathways, and military service) and advocating for postsecondary enrollment to be a part of school and district leadership evaluations

Who else is doing this?

- In Texas, school districts and individual teachers receive funding bonuses for improving postsecondary readiness, and it is a part of each school district's letter grade report card

More details: See Appendix, National Promising Practices: Texas Impact Network

Deep Dive: Recommendations (II/X)



Staffing

Provide more trusted resources for training and clock hour-eligible professional development for college & career advisors and “101-level” training for school-wide staff

Why this recommendation?

- More training was the #1 most requested support by survey respondents in districts, schools, and CBOs
- School-level participants in our research noted that outside of advisors, teaching staff are rarely trained in basic advising topics
- Respondents to our research relied heavily on “vetted” information like WSAC and OSPI resources, but they are also using a wide range of bespoke or self-researched information and they struggle to get up-to-date information (even basic contact info) on non-college pathways like apprenticeships

Who else is doing this?

- Washington Council for High School Counselor Relations, a nonprofit that offers paid membership for colleges and free membership for high schools, hosts annual counselor workshops that present information from colleges as well as OSPI, SBCTC, and WSAC. Members pay to attend workshops, clock hours are available
- Texas College Access Network is developing a “101” level training, based on their existing Texas OnCourse curriculum, that can help volunteers and staff quickly get up to speed on counseling essentials
- **More details: Appendix, National Promising Practices, Texas College Access Network**

Deep Dive: Recommendations (III/X)



Staffing

Advocate for at least one college and career specialist in each high school, formalize the specialist role within the education system

Why this recommendation?

- Survey respondents emphasized how college and career specialists maintain a singular focus on postsecondary access and are also adept at creating advising knowledge networks across districts, increasing the capacity of the whole district
- Survey respondents and districts we directly interviewed spoke about how losing funding for their college and career specialist means they can no longer provide good quality supports to students
- The specialist role is not a formal role in the school system, and not all districts can afford to hire or sustain a college and career specialist, creating a significant inequity

Who else is doing this?

- In Tennessee, the state pays for college and career advising support staff to work directly with schools to augment the capacity of counselors. These specially trained corps of staff are state employees and focus on working in urban school districts, while Tennessee's Ayers Foundation partnership supports the needs of rural schools

More details: See Appendix, National Promising Practices: Advise TN

Deep Dive: Recommendations (IV/X)



Partnerships

Develop college and career advising partnerships in rural areas, including virtual options

Why this recommendation?

- Rural areas have the least access to advising support from higher education institutions, community colleges, or community-based organizations – which are disproportionately located in the urban Puget Sound region
- Rural area college and career support should be inclusive of resources to specifically support American Indian students and connect teachers and advisors to national organizations that provide pathways for indigenous youth. For example, national programs like AISES (Advancing Indigenous People in STEM), American Indian College Fund, United National Indian YOUTH provide important tools for supporting indigenous students with postsecondary education and CTE access

Who else is doing this?

- In Tennessee, the Ayers Foundation partners with the state government to provide dedicated support 8th grade through college to students in rural high schools, leveraging their relationships in these areas to free up state resources to focus elsewhere – a similar partnership would be beneficial to rural Washington

More details: See Appendix, National Promising Practices: Advise TN

Deep Dive: Recommendations (V/X)



Curriculum

Develop college and career advising curriculum that blends with core subjects

Why this recommendation?

- Washington state does have a curriculum – [Career Guidance Washington](#) – but it has not been updated since 2016 and less than 40% of school-level respondents in our research said they had used it in the last year
- Districts instead use a large amount of bespoke curriculum, either built by external vendors (e.g. Naviance, Xello, etc.), from CBO partners if they have them, or developed from their own research
- Having to seek out and vet rapidly changing information is time consuming for school staff, students, and families
- Incorporating college and career advising topics into core subjects like English, math, and social studies can help maximize the time students already have, and help reinforce that postsecondary success is essential to their basic education journey
- Curriculum could be developed creatively, for example through grant funding to support curriculum writers, adapting summer externships, or crowdsourcing materials from counselors or district leaders with financial awards for the programs with the best tools

Who else is doing this?

- Programs like [Texas OnCourse](#) offer examples of starting places for dynamic statewide advising curricula in middle and high schools aligned to core subjects.

More details: See Appendix, National Promising Practices: Texas OnCourse, OneGoal

Deep Dive: Recommendations (VI/X)



Curriculum

Create a statewide common college and career climate survey with analysis support, to incorporate student voice into advising programs and track impact of advising efforts

Why this recommendation?

- Research shows that effective advising supports “student agency and ownership of their learning, and help[s] build student’s capacity for goal setting, decision making, and problem-solving skills to ensure future success”
- However, 71% of school and district survey respondents in our research said they disagreed or were neutral when asked if student voice was used to guide college and career advising efforts in their school/district
- This may be connected to the overall shortage of advising capacity in schools and districts. Survey respondents reported the lack of time to work with students as one of the biggest barriers to providing high-quality advising – in one case no more than 10-minute conversations with students were possible because of their workload

Who else is doing this?

- Washington State already participates in the [Healthy Youth Survey](#) every two years, collecting data on students experiences with mental health, social emotional support, and substance use. A similar statewide tool could be developed for the college and career space – expanding for example on CCER’s [high school college and career climate survey](#) which currently covers 7 school districts

Deep Dive: Recommendations (VII/X)



Data

Align on a single statewide online college and career advising platform that integrates curriculum and data collection

Why this recommendation?

- While person-to-person advising conversations will always be needed to fully support students, online platforms can help students research options, track tasks, and develop skills.
- Online platforms can also help schools and districts track student progress, and share data seamlessly with CBO partners and higher education programs without having to negotiate data-sharing agreements and develop bespoke data-sharing tools for each partner
- Only 53% of school-level respondents reported using an online platform to deliver college and career advising content – and the majority using online platforms are very large schools
- Schools are using a mix of Naviance, SchoolLinks, Xello, School Data Solutions, and other platforms to provide content, with no single platform reported as the main platform

Who else is doing this?

- In Connecticut, the RISE network developed “the Hub” to bring together student data from multiple sources into a single, easy to use system to support counselors in student advising. The Hub allows advisors to look both at individual student performance and track focus groups of students, ensuring their college access milestones are being met

More details: See Appendix, National Promising Practices: Connecticut RISE

Deep Dive: Recommendations (VIII/X)



Data

Create model data-sharing agreements that districts can adopt with all CBO partners, including sharing outcomes and HSBP data

Why this recommendation?

- Less than half of schools, districts, and CBOs in our survey knew if they had a data-sharing agreement in place with their advising partners
- Only 26% of schools and districts said they could track student outcomes from CBO college and career advising programs
- When data-sharing agreements are in place, CBO partners can access student information system and national clearinghouse data, allowing them to better support students while ensuring student data is protected
- However – only 27% of our CBO survey respondents said they have access to High School and Beyond data through their data sharing agreements

Who else is doing this?

- The Washington State Guaranteed Admissions Program, run by the Council of Presidents, negotiates data-sharing agreements with school districts to access student transcript and course data
- Connecticut RISE networks Hub program has data-sharing agreements, privacy protection training, and coaching around using data as part of its school district partnerships

More details: See Appendix, National Promising Practices: Connecticut RISE

Deep Dive: Recommendations (IX/X)



Equitable Supports

Expand investment in high school and beyond planning, including staffing support, curriculum development, and data collection into new statewide platform

Why this recommendation?

- High School and Beyond Plans (HSBP) – a longstanding graduation requirement in Washington State Public schools – are already integrated into school systems and calendars.
- Instead of being a robust planning process, HSBP has become too often a “check the box” exercise on the way to graduation. Rather than start over with a new system, we recommend expanding investment to make our existing system truly impactful and effective
- In the 2023 legislative session, the Washington State legislature tasked OSPI with the role of facilitating a transition to a single universal High School and Beyond platform in order to address inequities and increase consistency in WA state schools. The RFP for this project closed in October 2023 and the project is expected to begin in 2024, with the platform rolling out to schools in 2025
- The effort to create a single online platform for college and career advising statewide is a good first step, but it’s important that the platform truly support equitable advising, including allowing for:
 - Students to access consistent, high-quality information about their college and career opportunities
 - Advising partners – including counselors, teachers, CBOs and higher-ed institutions – to track student progress and outreach to students in need
 - Access to labor market information, career pathways guidance
 - Ability to export student progress data that is disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, primary language, etc.
 - Ability to export of key data like transcripts, which are essential for programs like Washington Guaranteed Admissions

Deep Dive: Recommendations (X/X)



Equitable Supports

Support funding of post-high school summer transition roles in schools and at CBOs

Why this recommendation?

- Most high school counselors do not work with students June-August, or operate with a skeleton crew – as we discovered in attempting to survey the advising workforce during the summer months
- One of the most challenging places to serve students is in the space between high school and what comes next – when students are not yet the full-time responsibility of their postsecondary pathway provider, and already graduated from high school
- Supporting and advocating for the funding of positions (or extending contracts for existing positions) at schools and community-based organizations that can help students navigate the summer transition phase – with transcripts, essential life skills (e.g. budgeting, self-advocacy), career planning, etc. would help fill this gap

Who else is doing this?

- There are many community-based organizations and higher-education programs that focus on the post-high school transition period with enrichment classes, campus preview programs, and cohort-based learning, so there are several models to learn from, for example [College Success Foundation's Rally for College](#), [Rainier Scholars](#), and [College Possible Washington](#)

Summary of recommendations for strengthening the field of college and career advising in Washington



Vision

- Recognize and reward completion of high-value, industry-recognized credentials and postsecondary enrollment achievement



Staffing

- Provide more trusted resources for training and clock hour-eligible professional development for college & career advisors and “101-level” training for school-wide staff
- Advocate for at least one college and career specialist in each high school, formalize the specialist role within the education system



Partnerships

- Develop college and career advising partnerships in rural areas, including virtual options



Curriculum

- Develop college and career advising curriculum that blends with core subjects
- Create a statewide common college and career climate survey with analysis support, to incorporate student voice into advising programs and track impact of advising efforts



Data

- Align on a single statewide online college and career advising platform that integrates curriculum and data collection (e.g. transcripts, HSBP steps, career pathways, labor market data etc.)
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Equitable supports

Expand investment in high school and beyond planning, including staffing support, curriculum development, and data collection into new statewide platform; Support funding of post-high school summer transition roles