



New Report Identifies Critical Predictive Metrics for Preventing a “Lost COVID Cohort”

Washington, D.C. (August 18, 2020) — Today, Education Strategy Group (ESG) and the Level Up Coalition released a [new report](#) estimating that there are roughly 7,000 high schools across the United States in which students of color or from low-income families have less than a 50 percent chance of transitioning directly to higher education following high school graduation. The report identifies eight of the most predictive measures for state and district leaders to prioritize in order to improve students’ postsecondary enrollment and success, changing the trajectory of these “coin flip” high schools.

The immense disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has deterred students’ progress on their educational journeys, hindered economic mobility, and exacerbated racial/ethnic and income gaps in academic achievement and engagement. In the years leading up to the crisis, roughly one million students graduated from high school and did not move on to postsecondary education or training. The impact of the pandemic makes it likely that this “leak” in our education pipeline will become a flood, largely comprised of students of color and those from low-income families — at a time when earning a postsecondary degree or credential is more important than ever. Without significant action and data-driven interventions, millions of students are at risk of becoming a “lost COVID cohort.”

“At a time when postsecondary credentials are the ticket to economic mobility, it’s unconscionable that so many low-income students and students of color attend high schools where they have only a 50/50 chance of moving on to college,” said Matt Gandal, President and CEO of ESG. “We must turn our collective attention to empowering and lifting up students in these ‘coin flip’ high schools so that their futures are not left to chance. This is especially urgent in the wake of COVID-19. We encourage schools, districts, and states to harness the predictive power of these momentum metrics to take action and meaningfully improve outcomes for students and families.”

Even prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, nearly every job created since the 2008 recession required some postsecondary education or training. Early information about shifts in the economy following the COVID-19 downturn indicates that the path to economic recovery and mobility will be even more difficult for those without high-quality postsecondary credentials. When students fail to successfully transition into postsecondary education immediately following graduation from high school, their odds of completing a degree or credential—and thus opening doors to economic opportunity—are substantially diminished.

From Tails To Heads: Building Momentum for Postsecondary Success offers a framework for a new set of postsecondary transition metrics for states and communities to prioritize in order to help more students successfully move to and through higher education. Collectively, the “Momentum Metrics” identified in the report represent eight critical predictive indicators of postsecondary preparation, retention, and success. They are designed to help educators and administrators target resources and supports at the individual student level as well as to inform broader conversations at the aggregate level about advising policies and programs.

To prepare the report, ESG paired research on key metrics with lessons from leaders in the field. The framework offered in the report is organized around three key phases of a student’s transition from high school to college: *preparing*, *applying* and *enrolling*. For each of the eight Momentum Metrics, the report



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offers a definition of how to measure it, a research-based explanation of why it is an important indicator of student success, and spotlights of states, systems, and institutions that have successfully used these metrics to improve performance and close gaps.

Despite their predictive power, very few states and districts currently use these metrics to measure the success of their schools or to target resources and interventions for students. ESG encourages state leaders to effectively use these metrics in a number of ways, including: track early progress toward meeting the state's postsecondary attainment goal; create incentives for districts to set and meet metric goals; incorporate the metrics in the state longitudinal data system and transparently report disaggregated outcomes; and, implement supportive policies to close equity gaps in postsecondary preparation identified by the metrics.

For their part, district leaders also need to prioritize the metrics in a variety of ways, including: adopt the Momentum Metrics as core measures of success; convene cross-sector leaders to review data and develop goals and plans for improvement; partner with postsecondary institutions to address gaps; and, communicate to students and families about the most predictive indicators of student progress and success.

Taken together, the Momentum Metrics represent the highest-leverage indicators that a student is on the path to successfully transition to college. With the informed support of educators, counselors, and state and district leaders, more students can and must access and enroll in higher education to realize their potential and achieve economic mobility.

For more information, download *From Tails to Heads: Building Momentum for Postsecondary Success* [here](#).

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About Education Strategy Group

Education Strategy Group supports America's education leaders and employers at the transition points that have the highest stakes for students and the highest impact for states, communities, and economies. We bring deep experience leading policy development, advocacy, and implementation work in the K-12, higher education, and workforce sectors.

About Level Up

Level Up is a coalition, organized by the Education Strategy Group, of local, state and national K-12 and higher education partners committed to measurably increasing the numbers of American high school students — particularly students of color, those from low-income families, and those whose parents did not attend college — who are prepared for and successfully complete postsecondary education and training programs.