



New Report Offers Strategies to Align Non-Credit and Credit Community College Programs to Advance Equity

Washington, D.C. (June 17, 2021) — Today, Education Strategy Group (ESG) released a [new resource](#) detailing a vision, framework, and recommendations for ensuring that high-quality, aligned advising is an expectation for every student, not enrichment for some. *[Making the Connection: Aligning Advising to Improve Postsecondary Access and Success](#)* is a microsite that makes the case for transforming how schools deliver counseling and advising support to students, starting as early as middle school and continuing to and through higher education, with a new vision, concrete action steps, and actionable resources for achieving alignment of high-quality advising across K-12 and higher education.

“Today we’re calling out a key gap that needs to be filled if we’re serious about advancing pathways to economic mobility in this country. Building the new pathways is important, but without a re-imagined approach to advising and social capital development, we won’t move the needle on participation and success for students of color and low-income students,” said Matt Gandal, President and CEO of Education Strategy Group. “I hope this new set of resources can support K-12 and higher education leaders who are working to build college and career momentum for their students, and, importantly, provide a roadmap for doing that work together. With new funds flowing to districts, institutions, and states from the American Rescue Plan, we urge leaders to build a more equitable system for their students by making advising an investment priority.”

There are few areas in which robust advice matters more than in education. High school students who receive high-quality advising gain a multitude of benefits, ranging from:

- **Academic**, including higher rates of participation in early postsecondary opportunities, increased high school graduation rates, and increased likelihood of completing a postsecondary credential;
- **Navigational**, including higher numbers of college applications to institutions that better match students’ academic credentials as well as increased FAFSA and scholarship application submission rates; and
- **Relational**, including higher expectations for their personal achievement and more relationships to build social capital.

Unfortunately, these benefits vary widely from district to district, school to school, and even within a school, and students of color and from low-income backgrounds are often the least likely to receive them. Furthermore, while advising was not optimally structured or consistently implemented prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the significant shifts in students’ postsecondary plans due to the pandemic have made addressing this issue much more urgent. There was a 13 percent drop in enrollment for first-time undergraduate students in fall 2020, and ongoing year-over-year decreases in FAFSA completion indicate that this trend is likely to persist into 2021. Undergraduate enrollment declines were even worse for students of color, threatening to exacerbate existing racial gaps in postsecondary attainment. Students are also facing tremendous obstacles as they transition into the workforce amidst an ongoing economic crisis. Given these challenges, a focus on strengthening and better aligning advising practices is urgently needed.

Over the past year, ESG has looked across the country to identify communities that have put innovative approaches to advising in place and dramatically increased their students’ likelihood of successfully transitioning to and succeeding in higher education and careers as a result. Turning to these leaders, ESG



convened an [Expert Work Group](#) of innovators in districts, states, and organizations to learn how to build upon and scale their work for the benefit of students across the country. The result of this effort, which is detailed in *Making the Connection*, is a new vision for ways in which states and local communities can build greater alignment in their advising systems and substantially reduce the number of students who get lost in the transition between high school, higher education, and careers.

The vision contains three major components:

1. 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.
2. These systems prioritize resources and support for low-income students, students of color, and first-generation students to **address deeply-embedded systemic inequities**.
3. 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.

In order to realize this new vision, ESG recommends that leaders commit to three key levers to create the enabling conditions for alignment.

- **Own the Hand-Off:** Leaders should create an action plan, convene collaborators, and establish a policy environment that prioritizes advising.
- **Pave the Path to Support:** Leaders should build capacity, simplify processes, enable cross-sector data sharing, and prioritize exploration & identity development.
- **Unlock Alignment at Scale:** Leaders should incentivize advising, support communities in establishing promising practices, and develop new methods.

The microsite lays out detailed recommendations for advancing each of these levers, and provides both immediate and longer-term action steps for leaders in K-12 districts and schools, higher education, state government, federal government, nonprofits and college access organizations, and philanthropy. The site also offers a repository of additional tools and resources from across the field to support communities with implementing these recommendations.

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About Education Strategy Group

Education Strategy Group is a mission-driven consulting firm that works with K-12, higher education and workforce leaders to achieve greater impact. We work across sectors and across the aisle to move the needle on issues that are critical to improving student success and increasing economic mobility for all.