

Choosing which path to pursue after high school is a big decision for students.

Even after they have determined their postsecondary path, there are many additional steps necessary to stay on track—from determining which college is the best fit to submitting applications to securing financial aid. The college admission process has many components and can be especially overwhelming for students who are the first in their families to attend college. Students often rely on school counselors to guide them through the postsecondary planning process, and access to strong advising services provides academic, navigational, and relational benefits. However, postsecondary advising capacity in districts is limited; high school counselors often have large caseloads, and learners of color and students from low-income families have less access to school counselors than their white and high-income peers.

Through their participation in the Momentum Metrics Network, the Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) team strove to better organize and equip school-based staff responsible for postsecondary advising to deliver strong student-facing supports. As a large district, college and career advising responsibilities and accountabilities are spread across many roles. In addition to high school counselors, some schools have graduation advisors, AVID elective teachers, transition specialists (for students in special education), academy coaches (for the career pathways aligned Academies of Nashville), college and career readiness coaches, and/or GEAR UP advisors and specialists. At the district level, several different departments, including the Department of College and Career Readiness and the Department of School Counseling—which sit in different branches of the organization—are responsible for system-level oversight and support of these roles, the vast majority of which report directly to school principals. In addition to these internal roles, external community-based organizations provide postsecondary advising support to MNPS students.

THE MOMENTUM METRICS NETWORK

was a cohort experience that provided dedicated coaching and support to help districts identify data-driven strategies to improve students' postsecondary attainment, with a special focus on students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and first-generation college-going students. The experience was grounded in ESG's seminal report *From Tails to Heads: Building Momentum for Postsecondary Success*, which identified eight high-leverage metrics that states, districts, and communities can prioritize to help more students move successfully through high school and into postsecondary education and training.

The "Momentum Metrics" are designed to help educators and administrators develop effective district-wide strategies and target key supports at the school and student level. Over the past two years, ESG has provided individualized coaching to a set of Tennessee districts, enabling district teams to analyze data, assess implementation capacity, identify sources of funding, and design and implement aligned district strategies to increase college and career readiness. During year one, district teams created action plans to drive improvements on specific Momentum Metrics; in year two, each district focused on deeper implementation of one of their plan's core elements.

MNPS BY THE NUMBERS

77,479

Total Students
Enrolled

71%

Black, Hispanic &
Native American

35%

Economically
Disadvantaged

Data pulled from the Tennessee Department of Education District Report Card.

METRICS OF FOCUS



College
Applications



FAFSA
Completion



College
Match



Seamless
Enrollment

INCORPORATING STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Throughout this implementation project, the MNPS team engaged a variety of stakeholders. Executive leadership was engaged on an ongoing basis to achieve strategic alignment across all major departments. They also engaged district staff and data leads in the Department of College and Career Readiness and Department of School Counseling. The MNPS team, with the support of their ESG coach, interviewed a number of building leaders and individuals who serve in the various advising roles, including AVID and GEAR UP coordinators and college and career readiness coaches. Finally, the district engaged external stakeholders, including the Nashville Chamber of Commerce and a number of community-based organizations.

The MNPS team realized that there needed to be better alignment among these roles to ensure all students had access to high-quality, comprehensive college and career advising. Their first step was to assess the current state of advising within the district through an examination of existing college and career strategies and assets and engaging internal and external stakeholders to provide feedback on their effectiveness. The team then used this work to align on shared vision for postsecondary advising and identify strengths and gaps relative to this vision. Next, the team analyzed existing job descriptions for all the roles that touch on postsecondary advising and synthesized a common set of functional responsibilities and accountabilities for specific student outcomes. They found that some roles related to college and career readiness were quite broad and included a long list of responsibilities that would be difficult for a single individual to successfully perform. They also identified gaps and redundancies in the current job descriptions. Then, they created a new district-wide framework for postsecondary roles and used it to help distribute critical responsibilities and accountabilities across those roles. This work was designed to ensure that students at every MNPS school receive the full spectrum of support, that each role tasked with providing that support has clarity as to its core goals

and activities, that no single role or individual is overloaded, and that any overlap in responsibilities across roles is intentional and coordinated. Through this process, each role was tied to specific Momentum Metrics and aligned to the district's overarching college and career readiness strategy.

With this new framework in hand, the Department of College and Career Readiness (CCR) launched a new CCR Executive Committee at the outset of the 2023–2024 school year, including all members of the Director of Schools' cabinet as well as other key district leaders. At its first meeting, the Executive Committee, including the district's Director of Schools, Chief Strategy Officer, and Chief of Academics, discussed and approved the new MNPS postsecondary advising framework. At the conclusion of the meeting, MNPS Director of Schools, Dr. Adrienne Battle, directed a cross-departmental team of district leaders to collaborate on near-term operationalization of the framework, which will be a priority item during each monthly check-in of the Executive Committee.

MAJOR WINS

- 1. Refreshed job descriptions for up to eight school-based advising roles.** These revised job descriptions were driven by role-responsibility frameworks and were approved by district leadership.
- 2. Launch of a CCR Executive Committee.** Partly as a result of this work, the district has launched an Executive Committee to drive and coordinate college and career readiness-related functions and activities across internal departments. It will also serve as a launching pad for engaging community-based organizations in implementing and supporting the CCR advising framework.

ONGOING CHALLENGES

- 1. School-level variation.** At the school level, there is significant variation in college and career readiness vision, strategy and staffing. As a result of this project, MNPS has done a better job of aligning and articulating the district's college and career readiness

strategy and the revised roles to ensure each school has staff that are responsible for overseeing key postsecondary metrics. Additionally, the newly formed CCR Executive Committee aims to promote cross-district alignment around postsecondary advising.

2. District office structure. MNPS, like many districts, has multiple departments that touch on college and career readiness, including the Department of College and Career Readiness and the School Counseling Department. This can promote siloing and inconsistent communication, making intentional collaboration and executive-level commitment crucial for achieving district-wide alignment and impact.

3. College and career readiness data. While the district has strong mechanisms for monitoring behavior, attendance, and FAFSA completion, MNPS does not have strong systems in place to track all Momentum Metrics, including college applications, college match, advanced coursework access and success, and seamless postsecondary enrollment. Addressing gaps in data collection is a next step for the district, as is including college and career readiness-related metrics in dashboards and/or other routines used to hold principals and other school-based roles accountable for outcomes.

THE ROAD AHEAD

The next step for the MNPS team is to finalize changes to the various advising roles and then communicate these changes with individuals who hold the affected roles and their supervisors. The district will also launch training opportunities to ensure that all roles understand their responsibilities and have the knowledge, skills, abilities, and tools to perform these roles effectively.

Revamping the district data system is another essential step. The district aims to better incorporate postsecondary metrics, including the Momentum Metrics, into its data collection processes and train advisors and school leaders on how to use that data.

Finally, the district will continue to enhance internal alignment and collaboration via the CCR Executive Committee, and will use this internal body as a springboard to facilitate more coherent and effective coordination with external college and career advising partners.