

# The Power of Data-Driven Aligned Advising



## Spotlight Collaboratives

### The Arkansas Department of Education

- Dual-Purpose Statewide Data System



### The Minority Male Success Initiative (MMSI)

- Early Intervention
- Governance



### Greater Together Clarksville

- Summer Bridge
- Senior Survey



### The University of Chicago To&Through Project

- Data Backbone
- Capacity Building



## ALIGNED ADVISING OVERVIEW

**Aligned Advising** provides a model in which high-quality advising is an expectation for every student, not just a select few. This approach ensures that such support is an integral part of both high school and postsecondary education and training. It is grounded in deep collaboration between K–12, postsecondary, and workforce partners to ensure that students have access to a wide range of services and supports as they transition to college, career, and life. In our research, we consistently found that the connection across these systems is insufficient, and replicates silos that lead to inequitable access and outcomes for students, particularly those who have been marginalized in our education and workforce systems. Examples of these gaps include a lack of attention and resources toward supporting career development and a hesitance to clearly define roles across student support experts, leading to misaligned advising practices across college and career planning staff. State policymakers have a critical role to play in addressing these gaps, and ensuring that all students have the support necessary to navigate the maze from high school to college and career.

## WHY STRONG DATA SYSTEMS MATTER

School districts, institutions of higher education, and workforce and industry partners have access to an array of postsecondary and workforce data points to support students in the transition to life after high school. And yet, these organizations face common challenges in accessing timely local/regional data to (1) inform real time advising and (2) build the capacity of counselors to leverage data insights. A [recent article from NCAN](#) highlighted the troubling fact that “more than 60 percent of school leaders say they ‘do not use’ data on postsecondary advising, postsecondary application, and postsecondary enrollment.”<sup>1</sup> To overcome this hurdle, states and regions need to develop robust, cross-sector systems for collecting and communicating postsecondary and workforce student planning data. These data, when used intentionally and effectively, can connect the relational and procedural elements that students need to be successful in college and career. ESG and the Data Quality Campaign discuss this system alignment and some of the constraints in depth in the recent report, [“Visualizing the Pipeline: The Importance of Cross-Sector Data.”](#)

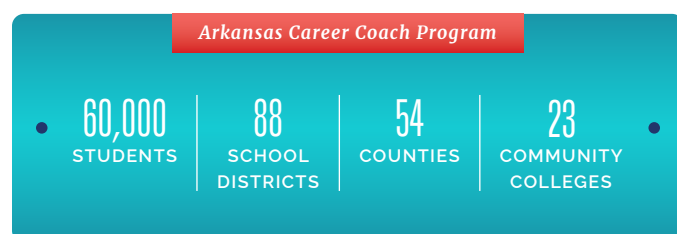
In most cases, the process for measuring success in K–12 school districts and institutions of higher education (IHE) is that each system independently defines postsecondary success metrics, then measures impact for the students that they serve. In these case studies, we explore sites across the country that are reimagining this siloed practice by co-developing metrics that span the two systems, and using that data to

coordinate progress monitoring and support for students. These partners identify innovative ways to layer incentives to get the right people to the table and use that traction to gain additional visibility, funding, and partnerships. They collaboratively name the objectives for the data collection and analysis, as well as clearly define the roles and responsibilities across stakeholders. Lastly, they use a single data entry system and associated outcome data to build the capacity of practitioners across systems through functional working groups, resource sharing, and comprehensive capacity-building efforts. All of these efforts combined provide education and workforce leaders the necessary tools to build cross-sector data infrastructure that systematically enhances the [academic, navigational, and relational outcomes](#) for students.

## PAVING THE WAY

### ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The [Arkansas Department of Education](#) has expanded their advising efforts to more intentionally incorporate career exploration and planning into advising support for students in intentional, scalable ways. As part of this effort, they have developed a statewide data system and associated metrics that guide the work of practitioners on the ground and provide critical infrastructure to effectively monitor student progress.



**Dual-Purpose Statewide Data System:** By leveraging a combination of state and district funding, the state developed the [Arkansas Career Coach Program](#), which is a combination of capacity building support on the ground and statewide data and policy measures that support accountability and fidelity in implementation. As of academic year 2024, the Arkansas Career Coach Program includes 101 career coaches serving over 60,000 students in 88 school districts and 54 counties in partnership with 23 community colleges.

Each district utilizes a data dashboard that gives an overview of student progress, including but not limited to touchpoints with their career coach, test scores, need for remedial courses, work-based learning experiences, and credentials earned. One of the unique features of this approach is that coaches are responsible for all metrics except for credentialing, providing a key reporting structure that increases accountability and creates the conditions for consistency across the state. This data system allows career coaches to run reports and add narratives, making it a useful tool for real time advising, while also providing critical statewide aggregate data that decision makers use to inform policy shifts and improve programmatic outcomes.

### THE MINORITY MALE SUCCESS INITIATIVE (MMSI)

Through the [Minority Male Success Initiative \(MMSI\)](#), housed under the North Carolina Community College system, 11 community colleges across North Carolina partnered to strengthen minority male student outcomes by leveraging cross-sector partnerships, data, and decision making. This initiative used a single data entry system called Watermark and leveraged substantial state level funding aimed at retention of students on their college path.

**Early Intervention:** This initiative used data on various student success measures such as outreach, GPA, course completion rate, and risk assessment scores to provide early alert academic interventions and target at-risk students across 11 campuses. At the smaller schools, coaches were responsible for directly connecting with students to provide support. At the larger campuses, a softer handoff from coaches to departments was provided. Alerts were viewable by all staff, faculty, and students. One unique feature of these alerts is that they also included messaging to emphasize positive interactions, which is a highly effective, strengths-based approach to communicating with students. Overall, the course completion rates increased for the MMSI cohort students in both in-person and online courses, and term-to-term persistence also increased in all four cohorts. Additionally, there was a 22.4 percent retention increase for new, full-time, minority-male students in pursuit of an associate's degree.<sup>3</sup>

**Governance:** Through a robust, cross-campus advisory, directors across the state regularly met to analyze data and define baseline metrics for all campuses. As part of the strategic planning process, the advisory committee collaboratively identified three high impact strategies that campuses should be honing in on: success coaches and the use of intensive/proactive advising, use of an early alert system, and programmatic support. Each of the groups across these strategies met individually and also held holistic meetings across all campuses to discuss student success. The advisory focused on alignment of people, processes, and the use of technology to increase capacity across coaches and improve student success outcomes.

### GREATER TOGETHER CLARKSVILLE

**Greater Together Clarksville** is a partnership between the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System (CMCSS) and three area postsecondary institutions: Tennessee College of Applied Technology-Dickson, Nashville State Community College-Clarksville, and Austin Peay State University (APSU). They have prioritized the intentional use of data to improve postsecondary outcomes for students in CMCSS. One of the unique features of this partnership is that it is a K-12 driven initiative with strong intermediary backing through [Tennessee State Collaborative on Reforming Education \(TN SCORE\)](#), providing a unique infrastructure for sustainability and cross-sector ownership in the region. Like most strong data-centered collaboratives, they have prioritized the use of a single data system to track outcomes and map impact. State leaders should consider replicating these partnership structures to ensure a comprehensive, data-informed approach to supporting students.

Through the strategic use of Salesforce, the Greater Together Clarksville collaborative is measuring the following:

**Summer Bridge:** Each institution leveraged grant funding to develop a Summer Bridge program, and comprehensively analyzed data on completion and success in the program, as well as summer melt rates. They were able to use this data to identify students who need additional support in Math and created specific interventions aimed at getting those students caught up before they start their postsecondary

education. Using success data, followed by data on students who stopped out, they are creating customized interventions to drive programming for bridge programs. As part of this revamp on their summer bridge programs, APSU developed a new curriculum that focuses on individual student interventions rather than a one-size-fits-all approach and other colleges in the area are following suit, leading to improved retention rates in these crucial bridge programs, and preventing “summer melt,” whereby students are accepted into college, but never actually enroll.

**Greater Together Clarksville Summer Bridge**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● INDIVIDUAL STUDENT INTERVENTIONS RATHER THAN A ONE-SIZE-FITS ALL APPROACH</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● IMPROVED RETENTION RATES IN BRIDGE PROGRAMS, PREVENTING “SUMMER MELT”</li> </ul>
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**Senior Survey:** Through the use of a senior survey given to all 12th grade students, all partners track progress on FAFSA, college applications, postsecondary plans, and other key data points to ensure that students are receiving the support they need. The extensive and thoughtful use of data across these systems has created a significant boost in outcomes for students. Enrollment is up in the Nashville State-Clarksville and the Austin Peay summer bridge programs compared to last summer, and the number of CMCSS seniors who completed the FAFSA by the end of the school year has also increased compared to last year.

### THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO TO&THROUGH PROJECT

**The University of Chicago To&Through Project** is leveraging regional data in groundbreaking ways. Through a robust partnership with K-12 and IHE stakeholders, this effort is increasing high school and postsecondary completion for students of color in the region.

**Data Backbone:** The University of Chicago To&Through project serves as a data backbone for K-12 and postsecondary work in Chicago, creating publicly available data tools and dashboards that articulate the

progress of Chicago Public School students as they navigate high school and postsecondary. To&Through leverages the data to incentivize additional partnerships and support policy shifts in the city. The collaborative has leveraged the data in thoughtful ways to elevate equity gaps for stakeholders in the region by using data to shine a light on the significant gaps for students across all metrics and emphasizing completion in addition to enrollment.

**Capacity Building:** In addition to developing data tools, To&Through builds the capacity of counselors and other stakeholders districtwide to improve real-time advising and counseling practices. By prioritizing the highest impact data points, and providing support to schools to interpret and use the data, they are able to provide ongoing progress monitoring to ultimately boost student preparation, persistence, and completion. This initiative prioritizes [data tools for practitioners](#) and hosts timely, data-related [webinars](#) that connect practitioners around common challenges.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

The sites above have shown that intentional strategies to share and clearly communicate data dramatically improve systems for educators and outcomes for students. These approaches provide cohesion for all partners and ensure that educators have more time to support their caseload of students in efficient, equitable ways. State and regional leaders can sustain the development and implementation of cohesive data systems by encouraging the strategies listed below:

- 1 Clearly name the objectives for postsecondary and career-related data collection.
- 2 Be consistent in the method for collecting and analyzing data, and build in accountability mechanisms that support fidelity.
- 3 Designate funding explicitly for regional data collaboration and prioritize college and career data collection and analysis in state legislation.
- 4 Co-develop metrics across systems and share student success outcomes.
- 5 Leverage the data insights to build capacity on the ground and inform advising support, as well as articulate statewide student outcome gaps and policy needs.