

# Advising and Student Supports at Community Colleges

Good advising and support services can help community college students complete a credential or transfer to a four-year institution. Advisors play an important role in helping students explore and realize their education and career goals, while academic services—like tutoring or writing support—can help students work through academic challenges. Financial, basic needs, and other nonacademic supports enable students to manage circumstances that may hinder their academic progress. Supports that address students' academic and nonacademic needs holistically are especially important for the success of underserved students, including Black, Latinx, low-income, and first-generation students.

## WHAT THE RESEARCH TELLS US

**Community college students receive limited advising due to a scarcity of resources, which slows progress toward a degree. Low-income, racially minoritized, and first-generation community college students are less likely than their higher-income, White, and continuing-generation peers to access support services.**

- With advising caseloads as high as 1,200 students per advisor,<sup>1</sup> many advisors do not have the capacity to proactively engage students and monitor their progress. The average community college student sees an advisor one or two times during the academic year.<sup>2</sup>
- Among entering community college students, just under half report that an advisor helped them set academic goals and create a plan for achieving those goals;<sup>3</sup> about 40% of students report that their experiences at their college contributed *very little* or *some* to their development of clearer career goals.<sup>4</sup>
- Half of students in their second term or later who plan to transfer to a four-year college report that they never used the transfer advising services available at their college.<sup>5</sup>
- Low-income, racially minoritized, and first-generation community college students may have more financial and other support needs but are less likely than their peers to reach out to advisors and faculty,<sup>6,7</sup> seek help managing finances,<sup>8</sup> and access other college-based support services.<sup>9</sup>

**Innovative advising approaches and technologies can help provide targeted support at key moments in students' progression through college.**

- Effective advising provides: *sustained* support for students throughout their tenure in college; *strategic* delivery of services that are differentiated based on the students' levels of need; *integrated* delivery of academic and nonacademic supports; *proactive* outreach to students; and *personalized* support.<sup>10</sup>
- Increasingly, colleges are turning to technologies to support career and course planning, alert staff when students are struggling, identify students who may need extra help, and schedule advising sessions.<sup>11</sup>

- New technologies alone are unlikely to affect students unless they are leveraged to provide a more intensive and personalized advising experience.<sup>12</sup>

**Evidence suggests that community college students who participate in targeted and intensive support programs experience improved outcomes.**

- The Accelerated Study in Associate Programs, or ASAP, program at the City University of New York offers participants personal, financial, and academic supports, including tuition and fee waivers, MetroCards, personalized advising, and career counseling. A rigorous evaluation estimated that the program increases three-year graduation rates by 18 percentage points and six-year graduation rates by 10 percentage points.<sup>13</sup>
- The Stay the Course (STC) program in Texas assigns students a social service provider to help them develop an action plan and monitor their progress, and it also offers coaching, referrals to other services, and access to emergency financial aid. Participating in the program significantly increases persistence and three-year graduation rates among women.<sup>14</sup>
- InsideTrack, a national nonprofit student success organization, deploys coaches who regularly communicate with program participants via phone calls and targeted, personalized text messages. Coaches support students in setting short-term goals that are aligned with their longer-term objectives, learning how to self-advocate, managing their time, and refining their study skills. A rigorous evaluation found that coached students are 5 percentage points more likely to persist to the next semester six months after initial assignment.<sup>15</sup>
- The whole-college Guided Pathways reform model emphasizes early student support, particularly in terms of education and career planning, using a case management advising approach. Preliminary evidence suggests that Guided Pathways reforms can improve student outcomes in the first year of college. A causal evaluation of Guided Pathways in three states is underway and will be completed in late 2022.<sup>16</sup>
- A study of TRIO Student Support Services at a Georgia public college suggests that the program improves retention and completion among participants, who are often from underrepresented racial backgrounds and/or are first-generation students.<sup>17</sup>

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR FEDERAL POLICY

- **Incentivizing sustained, strategic, integrated, proactive, and personalized advising practice.** Federal grants administered for student support services can support programs that align with these principles of advising.
- **Allowing allocation of grant funds for personnel.** Grant requirements that allow grantees to use funds for staff time to engage in advising redesign can help create short-term capacity to design and execute sustainable reforms.
- **Supporting states in streamlining technology and data systems.** System-level coordination of advising technologies and data platforms can make it easier for individual colleges to integrate technology tools into their practice and thus benefit from the efficiencies that these tools can provide.

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## Endnotes

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