



# Four Guiding Principles for Effective College and Career Advising

JULY 2021

Tessa Pennington



# Contents

Executive Summary .....	1
Introduction .....	2
One-on-one support .....	3
<b>Four Guiding Principles</b>	
1. Counselors need support to be successful.....	5
2. Advising isn't just for counselors or advisors .....	7
3. Technology complements human connection.....	9
4. Quality advising at scale requires cross-sector collaboration.....	11
Conclusion.....	12
Acknowledgments .....	12
Footnotes.....	13

*Greater Texas Foundation works to increase academic pathways to and through postsecondary education that are affordable, clear, and efficient.*  
**Read about our strategic priorities.**



# Executive Summary

College and career advising in high school is a critical touchpoint for students hoping to pursue postsecondary education. One-on-one advising from an in-school counselor is the best way to provide students with the information they need to successfully transition to postsecondary education.

Many schools and districts, however, lack the funding to employ enough counselors to engage in extensive one-on-one advising with each student. With the principle of fostering human connections at the forefront, these four guiding principles can enhance equitable access to high quality advising particularly in resource-strapped contexts:

## FOUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Advisers need support to be successful.
2. Advising isn't just for counselors or advisers.
3. Technology complements human connection.
4. Quality advising at scale requires cross-sector collaboration.

**A note on terms:** Though both can share similar responsibilities, 'counselors' and 'advisers' are distinct roles. The term 'counselor' refers to individuals with professional counseling certifications as defined in the Texas Administrative Code. Counselors are responsible not only for assisting students in navigating the postsecondary application process, but are also responsible for providing academic guidance, social support, and mental health services to their students. College and career advisers do not have a professional counselor certification and focus uniquely on providing students with the information and resources requisite to matriculate into postsecondary education. Many schools do not have dedicated college and career advisers and rely primarily on their counselors to advise their students on postsecondary education.



## Introduction

College and career advising can be a critical tool to help high school students, particularly prospective first-generation college students and students from low-income families, to successfully pursue a postsecondary credential. Despite the important role advising can play in increasing equity and access to postsecondary education for students, high schools often lack the resources to provide adequate counseling services to support the students who need it most.

*The COVID-19 pandemic spurred a decrease in college-going behaviors, particularly among low-income and first-generation students.*

**The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends that schools employ a counselor to student ratio of no more than 250:1.** However, in a landscape survey of high school counselors in Texas, researchers found that the **majority of counselors (70 percent) reported working with over 300 students** and 17 percent reported serving more than 600 students.<sup>1</sup> Regardless of counselor ability or dedication to student success, such a large caseload will inevitably result in vulnerable students falling through the cracks.

This concern is particularly heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has spurred a decrease in college-going behaviors. Fewer low-income students are applying for college this year compared to 2019.<sup>2</sup> Though the overall number of college applications is up this year compared to 2020, the increase is primarily due to wealthy students applying to more schools on average than they did last year. The Common App saw a 2 percent decrease in applicants who qualified for waived application fees and a 3 percent decrease in first-generation applicants. The number of low-income students completing the FAFSA was also down 5 percent from last year and the number of first-generation FAFSA completers was down 10 percent.<sup>3</sup>

In light of these immense challenges, state agencies, educational institutions, and community-based organizations are making diverse efforts across the state to improve advising for Texas students. **This brief will describe the characteristics of successful advising models in contexts where adding more counselors or advisers may not be feasible.** The recommendations in this brief draw on secondary research, expert interviews, and lessons learned from efforts that are making a difference. The goal is to provide useful information to funders, educational institutions, community-based organizations, and government agencies interested in enhancing college and career advising to increase equitable postsecondary access and success for all students.



## One-on-One Support From an In-School Counselor or Adviser Is Vital

The role high school counselors play in students' transition to postsecondary education is irreplaceable. The College & Career Readiness & Success Center at American Institutes for Research describes the importance of school counselors:

Equipped with advanced training focused on addressing students' post-secondary, career, social-emotional, and school safety goals, school counselors are well positioned to provide the expertise and leadership required to help realize states' individualized learning goals... Although classroom teachers have regular contact with students, they may lack the expertise to address the full spectrum of students' needs. School counselors represent a potential, but underutilized, resource in providing that personalized student support and broader school staff development to address these student needs.<sup>4</sup>

Individualized attention from counselors can have a dramatic impact on students' college-going behaviors. Research from the National Association for College Admission Counseling found students who met individually with a counselor to discuss postsecondary plans were almost 7 times more likely to complete a FAFSA application and 3 times more likely to enroll in college compared with peers who did not receive one-on-one support.<sup>5</sup> The returns to individualized advising are even higher for low-income students and students of color.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the importance of individual advising for student success, schools across the country and in Texas face severe shortages of school counselors. Even as states have enacted policies to promote personalized learning opportunities, the counselor-to-student ratio has remained relatively static.<sup>7</sup> Often, the students who need personalized advising the most, including low-income students and students of color, are those

with the least access to it.<sup>8</sup> The American Civil Liberties Union reported in 2019 that 1.7 million students across the United States attended a school with a uniformed police officer on campus but no school counselor.<sup>9</sup>

The reality is our schools need more counselors. For resource-strapped schools and districts, however, hiring enough qualified counselors to meet their students' individual needs is often not possible.

To address this dilemma, The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board launched the **Advise TX College Advising Corps** program in 2011. This program partners with institutions of higher education across Texas to place recent college graduates as advisers in high schools with large numbers of students who do not pursue a postsecondary education. Advise TX advisers serve in a high school for two years and assist students with the complexities associated with the college application process.

#### The program has had marked success:

Compared to seniors at similar Texas high schools, students with an Advise TX College Advising Corps adviser were more likely to complete an AP course, more likely to take the SAT exam, and more likely to submit their FAFSA. Furthermore, students who have met with an Advise TX College Advising Corps adviser are more likely to aspire to go to college, participate in college-prep activities, apply to colleges, be accepted to college, and be committed to enrolling in college.<sup>10</sup>

Having adequate counselor-to-student ratios is perhaps the most critical component to a successful advising program. Even with resourceful interventions to increase the number of counselors or advisers on campus such as Advise TX, significant advising gaps remain. Experts interviewed for this brief emphasized that nothing can replace the power of a meaningful human connection to improve a student's access to postsecondary education. However, **the following four principles can guide successful advising in instances where schools and districts have limited resources to leverage.**



*Students were more likely to complete an AP Exam, take the SAT, and submit their FAFSA.*



ENGINEERING GRADUATES AND POLYMER 2011  
A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION

*J. Carreras*  
**ACHIEVE**  
Early College High School  
TEXAS EXEMPLARY

# 1 Counselors need support to be successful.

School counselors have tremendous power to impact the college-going behaviors of the students they serve. Despite their important role in increasing postsecondary access for students, they have large caseloads and myriad responsibilities outside of college and career counseling that require substantial portions of their time.

With limited time to spend on postsecondary advising, counselors need access to high-quality training and tools to maximize their impact on students. Several organizations throughout the state have stepped up to the challenge to provide counselors with accessible professional development opportunities and tools to enhance their advising practices. [Texas OnCourse](#) is a state-funded initiative to improve postsecondary readiness for students across the state. In addition to providing information directly to students, Texas OnCourse provides professional development resources to educators and counselors through its Texas OnCourse Academy. This program offers counselors access to over 30 different modules related to postsecondary advising.<sup>11</sup>

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, TxCAN and Get Schooled initiated a partnership with Texas OnCourse, 60x30TX, United for College Success, and College Forward to launch the [Future Focused Texas \(FFTX\)](#) campaign. **FFTX provides free digital resources to counselors to help them easily reach their students in**

**a virtual format.** In addition to providing material that counselors can send to students on the college application and financial aid process, FFTX also hosts webinars to create a sense of community among counselors, many of whom experience burnout and feel overwhelmed by their many responsibilities to help students through the COVID pandemic.<sup>12</sup>

Professional development and resources such as those provided by Texas OnCourse and the FFTX campaign can increase the capacity of counselors to serve their students. In a recent feedback survey issued to FFTX participants, advisors provided testimonials on the value of the resources provided. Several survey respondents noted the convenience of having all resources in one place allowed them to spend more time counseling students. One survey respondent called FFTX “a God-send.” Counselors have a clear demand for resources and support that lighten their load.



*Tools to  
maximize  
impact*

+

*High-quality  
training*

+

*Professional  
development  
opportunities*

+

*Free digital  
resources*

+

*Webinars*

## **NETWORK OF CARE APPROACH:**

*faculty, non-counseling staff on-site coaches, industry mentors, 1:1 student mentorship, external partners, virtual advisors, 24/7 virtual access*

# 2 Advising isn't just for counselors or advisers.

Recognizing the tremendous caseload of counselors across the state, many organizations enlist non-counseling staff, faculty, and mentors to supplement the support of in-school counselors. Here are examples from four organizations implementing a **network of care approach**.

## Centers for Applied Science and Technology (CAST) Schools

CAST Schools is piloting an innovative approach to advising that empowers students to proactively seek support from a network of trusted adults. Central to this approach is the democratization of the role of advising. CAST Schools is shifting its college and career counselors to lead a team of supportive adults, all of whom are engaged in advising. CAST students are connected to a network of adults, including industry mentors, who facilitate conversations about career and college, starting in their freshman year. Starting in the 9th grade, all students participate in a purpose-planning process in which they identify postsecondary education, career, and life goals. In addition to long-term goal setting and visioning, students participate in guided college and career reflection activities throughout their high school experience. The network of supportive adults will give CAST students the ability to make informed decisions even after they leave high school.<sup>13</sup>

This approach is innovative and new with promising initial results. In January of 2021, Greater Texas Foundation awarded a grant

to CAST Schools to continue developing this model, evaluate student outcomes, and create a toolkit for other schools interested in implementing their holistic advising model.

## College Forward

College Forward places coaches on-site in partner schools across Central Texas. These coaches support a cohort of students who apply for and are accepted into the program. Students are eligible to apply if they are in the top 60 percent of their high school class or if they would be the first in their family to earn a postsecondary degree. The program provides students with the opportunity to participate in college visits, essay writing workshops, college entrance exam preparation courses, and personalized guidance on the college application and selection process.

Evaluation shows students who participate in the program are more likely to attend and graduate college than their peers who did not participate in the program. **90 percent of students served by College Forward enroll in college after high school** and 82 percent persist to their second year. Overall, students who participate in College Forward's program are 2.5 times more likely to graduate college than students who did not participate.<sup>14</sup>



## Breakthrough Central Texas

Breakthrough Central Texas developed a school-based model that provides counseling and college prep services to prospective first-generation students from 6<sup>th</sup> grade through college. In addition to extended learning opportunities and leadership experiences, Breakthrough provides students with access to comprehensive virtual advising. Students participating in the program are paired with an advisor and have 24/7 virtual access to counseling services. The personalized advisors help each student from their entrance into the program as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> grade through their first years of college.

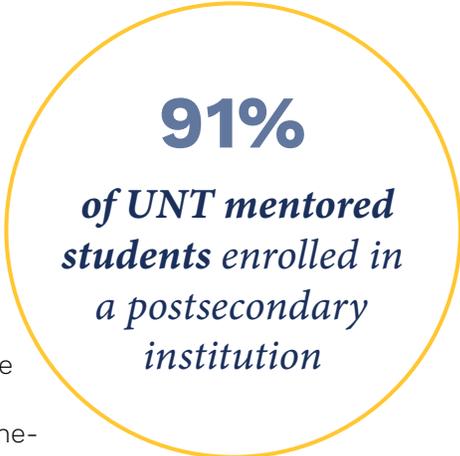
Students who participate in the program are seven times more likely to earn a postsecondary degree than their peers who do not participate. In 2019, 96 percent of Breakthrough's participants graduated high school on time, 98 percent completed a FAFSA application, and 90 percent enrolled in a postsecondary institution.<sup>15</sup>

## UNT Career Connect

The University of North Texas (UNT) established the High School Career Connect (HSCC) program in response to the passing of Texas House Bill 5 stipulating that students

select an academic track, or endorsement, in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The model centers on providing middle school and high school students one-to-one mentorship opportunities with current UNT students. UNT mentors are rigorously trained and meet with students in career centers at partner schools. Mentors are also available to students remotely through HSCC's digital platform, allowing the program to extend its reach to high school students outside of UNT's immediate geographic area. Mentors assist students with navigating the requirements of HB 5 and other aspects of the college application process. Students also receive guidance on selecting a major and career path and how to sequence their coursework to achieve their goals.

This advising model has helped students move to and through college and onto career paths. Of the students mentored in the Fall 2019 semester, 91 percent enrolled in a postsecondary institution. This figure is 36 percentage points higher than the state-wide average.<sup>16</sup>



These four examples show the innovative approaches organizations are using to supplement the critical influence of in-school counselors to reach more students.

# 3 Technology complements human connection.

Technology is becoming an increasingly important component of scalable advising solutions across the nation and in Texas. Particularly in the context of COVID-19, which forced counselors to pivot to virtual platforms to reach their students, accessible and effective technology is critical.

In response to the growing need for effective technological solutions, The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) developed the **Virtual Advising Project** to increase student access to high-quality information on the postsecondary admissions and enrollment process. Through this project, THECB developed an artificial chatbot called ADVi to interface directly with students to answer their questions about the college-going process. High School students can text ADVi for general information about key milestones in the college application process, answers to common questions, and can receive nudges with suggested action steps. Students with more specific questions are referred to the Virtual Advising Project's staff of advisers.<sup>17</sup> THECB has partnered with the Urban Education Institute at The University of Texas at San Antonio to evaluate the impact on students.

Get Schooled is another organization utilizing technology solutions to scale their advising efforts. Get Schooled provides an online

platform for high school students to access resources and support as they move through the college application process. Students who sign up for an account can use the Get Schooled text line to get 1:1 live support from a trained adviser. **Get Schooled engages students through its gamified and youth-friendly digital platform** and offers personalized text and email support for students.

Evaluation of this model shows that students who participated in the program were 7 percent more likely to complete the FAFSA, 9 percent more likely to enroll in college, 10 percent more likely to attend college, and 8 percent more likely to re-enroll for the Spring semester of their first year.<sup>18</sup>

Although technology solutions are critical to increasing student access to advising services, experts caution that these solutions cannot replace students' interactions with counselors and mentors. This is particularly true for students who need extra advising support, such as low-income and first-generation college students. Technology can be a powerful tool to answer easy student questions and provide well-supported students with basic information they need to move through the postsecondary application process. This can lighten counselor caseload to allow them greater bandwidth to focus on students who need greater personal guidance.



*Accessible and effective technology is critical.*

*However, these solutions cannot replace students' interactions with counselors and mentors.*

# 4 Quality advising at scale requires cross-sector collaboration.

In addition to the principles outlined in the previous sections, successful advising practices must involve cross-sector coordination to generate sustained impact for students. Students are **best served when leaders from state and local governments, K-12 institutions and institutions of higher education work together** with a common vision to ensure that students experience sustained support to and through post-secondary education. As one public education official said, “Everyone has a responsibility from K through 12 to ensure a return on investment on the work.”<sup>19</sup>

Collaboration between postsecondary institutions and K-12 schools is critical to helping students to and through post-secondary. Texas has several examples of this kind of meaningful collaboration. Through a partnership with Big Thought, the Dallas County Promise program matches all Promise Scholars with a volunteer Promise

Success Coach in high school. This coach provides them with valuable resources and information on the college application and enrollment process. As students transition to college, they are connected with another Success Coach at their new institution. Having a designated point of contact for these students at both their high school and college facilitates a more seamless transition.<sup>20</sup>

Advising practices at Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD are another example of innovative partnerships to improve the postsecondary transition for students. PSJA ISD employs several college transition advisers who are embedded at local postsecondary institutions to serve as “one-stop shops” for students graduating from PSJA ISD schools.<sup>21</sup>

Strong cross-sector collaboration to provide effective advising services to students can be an important way to strengthen college-going culture and prevent students from becoming disconnected from education and workforce systems.





*Every high school student needs access to high-quality advising.*

*The principle of fostering human connections is at the forefront of solutions.*

## Conclusion

Every high school student needs access to high-quality advising. In an ideal advising model, every student would have unrestricted access to on-campus counselors or advisers who proactively reached out to them. Unfortunately, many resource-strapped school districts across the state cannot afford that kind of model. With the principle of fostering human connections at the forefront, there are solutions to the advising resource challenge that can help more students to and through college. Providing training and technological tools to counselors can increase their capacity to effectively serve larger caseloads. Enlisting non-counseling faculty and mentors from the broader community can also improve student access to high-quality advising.

State agencies, educational institutions, and community-based organizations across the state are working to address the gap in access to quality advising for Texas students. Coordination and shared vision across these efforts is essential to provide equitable quality advising across the state.

College and career advising in high school is a critical touchpoint for students hoping to pursue postsecondary education. **Philanthropic and government investment in effective advising practices is critical to promoting more equitable access to higher education for Texas students.**

# Acknowledgements

Greater Texas Foundation would like to thank the following individuals for sharing their expertise with our team. Their insights were central to shaping this brief.

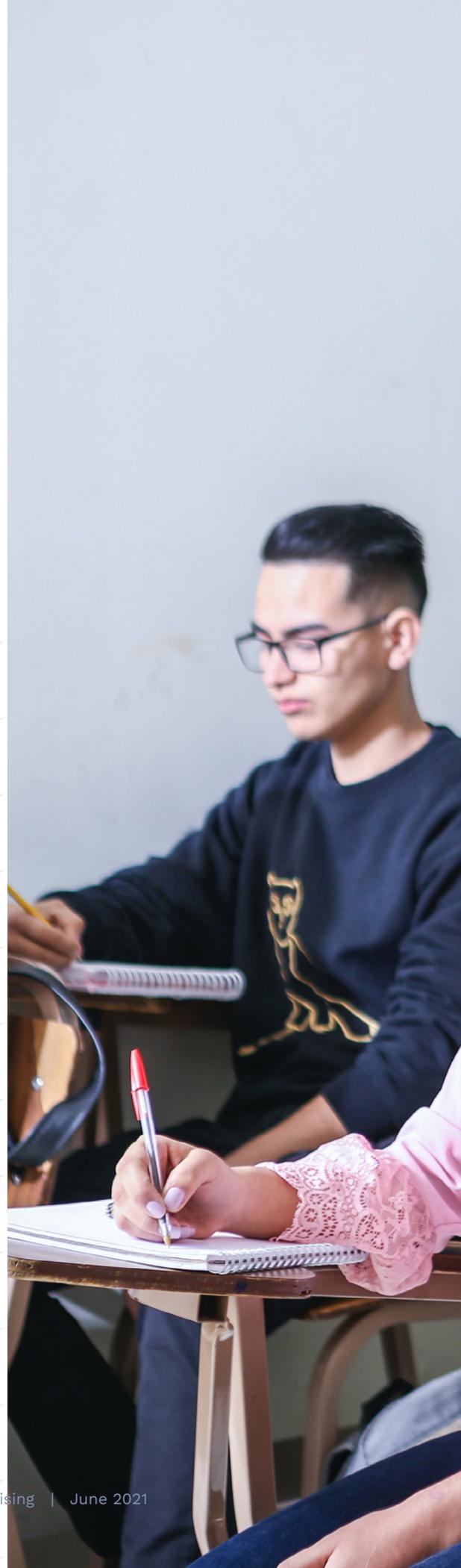
**Alexis Bauserman**, *Texas Education Agency*

**Yvonne Eype**, *United for College Success*

**Phillip Fabian**, *Dallas County Promise*

**MoraLee Keller**, *National College Attainment Network*

**Shareea Woods**, *Texas College Access Network*





# Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Giani, Matt S., and Amy Lipka. “The State of Postsecondary and Career Advising in Texas: Results of the Texas OnCourse Survey.” <https://texasoncourse.org/media/1445/oncourse-survey-results-012417-final.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Marcus, Jon. 2021. “As admissions season descends, warning signs appear for low-income applicants.” *The Washington Post*. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/college-admissions-wealth-gap-covid/2021/02/18/8c606766-712d-11eb-b8a9-b9467510f0fe\\_story.html?mc\\_cid=81e2965abe&mc\\_eid=571c90e07e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/college-admissions-wealth-gap-covid/2021/02/18/8c606766-712d-11eb-b8a9-b9467510f0fe_story.html?mc_cid=81e2965abe&mc_eid=571c90e07e)

<sup>3</sup> Lederman, Doug. 2021. “Aid Application Data Portend Dip in Low-Income, Minority Students.” *Inside Higher Ed*. [https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2021/02/11/data-financial-aid-applications-portend-drop-low-income-minority?utm\\_source=Inside+Higher+Ed&utm\\_campaign=8e87a75668-WNU\\_COPY\\_01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_1fcbc04421-8e87a75668-236571466&mc\\_cid=8e87a75668&mc\\_eid=9fb029bfce](https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2021/02/11/data-financial-aid-applications-portend-drop-low-income-minority?utm_source=Inside+Higher+Ed&utm_campaign=8e87a75668-WNU_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1fcbc04421-8e87a75668-236571466&mc_cid=8e87a75668&mc_eid=9fb029bfce)

<sup>4</sup> Strear, Molly, Hellen Duffy, and Melissa Aste. 2019. “Building a System for Postsecondary Success.” *College & Career Readiness & Success Center*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED597826.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Dunlop Velez, Erin. “How Can High School Counseling Shape Students’ Postsecondary Attendance.” *NACAC*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED608301.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Belasco, Andrew S. 2013. “Creating College Opportunity: School Counselors and Their Influence on Postsecondary Enrollment.” *Research in Higher Education* 54, 781-804. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11162-013-9297-4>; The Education Trust. 2019. “School Counselors Matter.” [https://s3-us-east-2.amazonaws.com/edtrustmain/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/30161630/School-Counselors\\_2019\\_V7.pdf](https://s3-us-east-2.amazonaws.com/edtrustmain/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/30161630/School-Counselors_2019_V7.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Strear, Molly, Helen Duffy, and Melissa Aste. 2019. “Building a System for Postsecondary Success: The Pivotal Role of School Counselors.” *AIR*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED597826.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> The Education Trust & Reach Higher & ASCA. 2019. “School Counselors Matter.” [https://s3-us-east-2.amazonaws.com/edtrustmain/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/30161630/School-Counselors\\_2019\\_V7.pdf](https://s3-us-east-2.amazonaws.com/edtrustmain/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/30161630/School-Counselors_2019_V7.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> American Civil Liberties Union. 2019. “Cops and No Counselors: How the Lack of School Mental Health Staff is Harming Students.” [https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field\\_document/030419-acluschooldisciplinereport.pdf](https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/030419-acluschooldisciplinereport.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> “Advise TX.” Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. <http://reportcenter.thecb.state.tx.us/agency-publication/miscellaneous/advise-tx-one-pager/>

<sup>11</sup> For more information on Texas OnCourse, please visit <https://texasoncourse.org/educators/popular-links/future-focused-tx/>

<sup>12</sup> For more information on FFTX, please visit <https://getschooled.com/journey/future-focused-tx-content/preparing-for-a-productive-winter/>

<sup>13</sup> For more information on CAST Schools' approach to advising, please visit <https://castschools.com/>

<sup>14</sup> For more information on College Forward, please visit <https://collegeforward.org/>

<sup>15</sup> For more information on Breakthrough Central Texas, please visit [http://breakthroughctx.org/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwvr6EBhDOARIsAPpqUPF-B5NSQmMaxz2FcuiW-pLYjlOzro4ewE8RGOSLmpJfnspZ2dyvN8QaAmNFEALw\\_wcB](http://breakthroughctx.org/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwvr6EBhDOARIsAPpqUPF-B5NSQmMaxz2FcuiW-pLYjlOzro4ewE8RGOSLmpJfnspZ2dyvN8QaAmNFEALw_wcB)

<sup>16</sup> For more information on UNT's High School Career Connect program, please visit <https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/high-school-career-connect>

<sup>17</sup> To learn more about THECB's work with ADVi, please visit <https://askadvi.org/about/>

<sup>18</sup> For more information on Get Schooled, please visit <https://getschooled.com/>

<sup>19</sup> DeBaun, Bill and Kelly Mae Ross. 2020. "The Data That Matter And The Plans That Work: New Districtwide Approaches to Student Success Beyond High School." NCAN. [https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.ncan.org/resource/resmgr/publications/ncan\\_report\\_-\\_the\\_data\\_that\\_.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.ncan.org/resource/resmgr/publications/ncan_report_-_the_data_that_.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> To learn more about Dallas County Promise, please visit <https://dallascountypromise.org/faq>

<sup>21</sup> To learn more about PSJA ISD's partnerships, please visit <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/sharing-responsibility-for-college-success.pdf>



GREATERTEXAS FOUNDATION

[greatertexasfoundation.org](http://greatertexasfoundation.org)