"To and Through" Advising Indicators

Effective indicators highlight what matters to student success. They provide timely information and importantly, can be changed by effective practices. When used well, they help to focus conversations among educators, students, and families on the most important elements of the postsecondary application and transition process. They also enable educators and schools to monitor progress, ensuring that all students – and subgroups of students – are receiving the supports they need.

Below, we describe a variety of advising indicators, in use by leading schools and college access programs, that emphasize a "to and through" approach to advising. There are no perfect indicators, so we've also included notes from conversations with researchers and practitioners that highlight nuances and provide guidance for use.

1. Estimated Postsecondary Completion

Many school systems and communities aspire to take a "to and through" approach and aim to increase students' postsecondary completion rates. The challenge, though, is the significant time lag – at least six years – to track these students longitudinally and calculate a completion rate. Estimated Postsecondary Completion (EPSC) is an interim outcome measure that provides more immediate improvement data and is highly predictive of six-year postsecondary graduation rates. This interim outcome measure is based on research showing that students' likelihood of graduating from a given postsecondary institution mirrors the institutional graduation rate.

EPSC is valuable for two purposes. First, it provides school systems and their communities with a timely and accurate gauge on a critical outcome: students' postsecondary success. Second, and perhaps more importantly, it can be used along with other indicators as the basis for improvement efforts.

Calculating Estimated Postsecondary Completion (EPSC)

Based on historic *subgroup* graduation data, EPSC is the estimated rate at which students will graduate from the institutions where they matriculate. Consider a school with five students:

Student	Graduation Rate at Institution Where Student Enrolls	EPSC
Student 1, African-American	80% African-American graduation rate	80%
Student 2, Caucasian	60% Caucasian graduation rate	60%
Student 3, Latino	40% Latino graduation rate	40%
Student 4, African-American	20% African-American graduation rate	20%
Student 5, Caucasian	Does not enroll	0
Total School EPSC		**40%**

2. Selectivity Growth

Selectivity growth is one indicator that advisors use with students to help them understand how their academic performance relates to their postsecondary options. It can also help students to better understand their opportunities and address undermatch. Selectivity growth is based on two inputs: GPA and SAT/ACT scores.

Potential Tools for Measurement and Advising:
- Selectivity Index: a tool that helps students identify match and overmatch schools. A student is assigned a selectivity label based on their test scores (ACT or SAT) and GPA. The goal is to increase the selectivity of students, which will help them match to better schools. For example, New York City uses Barron's Selectivity Categories.
- College Match Score: a more nuanced approach that develops match ratings for students and institutions. The match score considers a student's GPA and SAT/ACT and the average GPA and SAT/ACT for admitted students at each institution. This method captures the value of small improvements that are lost when using large selectivity buckets.

Notes for Use
- Selectivity tiers are often too big to capture or account for student academic growth. For example, if a student improves her GPA from 3.0 to 3.3, she may not cross a selectivity threshold. Her GPA improvement, which is predictive and important to postsecondary success, is not captured. Schools using selectivity tiers should guard against the unintended consequence of a narrow focus on pushing so-called "cusp" students across thresholds to a higher tier.
- GPA is far more predictive of college enrollment than SAT/ACT scores. The focus should be on improving GPA.
- Research shows that undermatch is pervasive among students from low-income families and students of color. Schools should monitor patterns to ensure they can address opportunity gaps across student subgroups.

3. Application and Decision Match, Applications to Institutions that Support Student Success

Students are much more likely to persist to degree attainment if they attend a well-matched (or over-match) institution. Furthermore, low-income students who receive help at school identifying postsecondary programs and completing postsecondary applications are significantly more likely to enroll in a postsecondary school.

Potential Tools for Measurement and Advising:
- At a minimum, schools should monitor key dates and whether students have reviewed applications lists with an advisor.
- Advisors use tools, such as the college match score above, to help students select a range of schools (likely, target, reach) to apply to. Many advising programs incorporate data from past student populations so that the guidance is customized based on past

students from his/her own district or high school. These data can include information on likely financial awards and the true cost of families' out-of-pocket expenses.

Notes for Use:
- Institutional selectivity is somewhat predictive of graduation rate, but it is not perfect. Though institutional selectivity is a useful tool for advisors, institutional graduation rate, captured in EPSC, is more predictive of student completion. It is critical to signal the importance of balance between selectivity and institutional graduation rates.
- To simplify, districts may start by tracking a clear binary metric. For example, the District of Columbia Public Schools tracks the percentage of students who apply to at least one school with a 40% or higher graduation rate.
- Students need support in both the application and decision process. Systems that track where applications are submitted, where students are accepted, and where they choose to enroll develop important information that can be used to inform advising for future cohorts of students.

4. Financial Aid and Unmet Need

College cost and perceptions around cost are barriers that all low-income students must overcome. Completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a key predictor of college enrollment and continued persistence. FAFSA completion is required to qualify for federal aid and a variety of other financial supports and it can reveal to concerned families that college can be more affordable than they may have thought. Overall financial affordability is also critical, since students with excessive unmet financial need are significantly less likely to enroll and persist in postsecondary education.

Potential Tools for Measurement and Advising:
- Incorporation of likely and historical and financial award data into the college list development and application process (see above). This engagement with both students and their families helps overcome misperceptions around cost and emphasizes the importance of finances when choosing schools.
- FAFSA completion data
- Amount of unmet need for each individual student and/or average unmet need for college-bound students (based on financial aid award letter review and comparison)
- Student Aid Report (SAR) Reviews: Students receive the SAR after submitting their FAFSA. It provides students basic information about eligibility for federal financial aid and alerts them to any further verification needs.
- FAFSA verification, including # of students selected and rate of successful on-time completion
- College Scholarship Service (CSS) Profile completion: All highly selective colleges that meet full financial need and have the best retention/graduation rates require the CSS Profile.

Notes for Use:
- Monitoring FAFSA completion data is a critical, basic step. All high schools should track and monitor progress.
- While unmet need is a critical component for students, analyzing award letters and assessing unmet need can be a time-consuming and resource intensive process. Community partnerships and other creative approaches may be necessary to ensure students have the support they need.

5. Summer Melt

Each year, a significant number of students who have already been admitted to postsecondary institutions fail to enroll. There are a variety of causes, but many relate to the complex tasks, such as completing financial aid verification processes, or financial hurdles, such as paying a housing deposit before receiving financial aid, that students must navigate at a time when they have little or no support. Summer melt affects 10 to 20 percent of college-intending students each year, with rates higher among those from low-income backgrounds and those who would be first in their family to attend college.

Potential Tools for Measurement and Advising:
- Schools will need to track admittance data. They then use the enrollment data they already have as part of their EPSC calculations and compare it to admittance data to determine the percentage of admitted students who fail to enroll. They can also track the % of students who switch from a four-year institution to a two-year institution.
- There are many tracking, communications, and other tools that enable schools and college access programs to support students over the summer.

Notes for Use:
- There is a strong relationship between family engagement in the application process and summer melt. Schools should consider family engagement as a component of these initiatives.
- Some schools and college access programs are developing diagnostics to assess the likelihood of summer melt so that they can better target student supports.

6. Agency, Motivation, Purpose, and Plan

Motivation and self-efficacy are among many critical social/emotional competencies essential to college success. There is an emerging consensus among practitioners that attention to these factors should be part of the college advising process and that they are predictive of desired postsecondary outcomes. Students who fail to exhibit a thoughtful purpose and plan are much more likely to melt and should be high priorities for summer intervention.

While there is acknowledgment in the field that indicators in these areas are critical, there is no consensus on the appropriate metric. Many organizations are attempting to better understand these issues and we look forward to learning from grantees' efforts.

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