



Evaluation Report on Advise TX

A Report on the Effectiveness of Advise TX (per Rider 53, III-58)

DRAFT

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I. Executive Summary

Advise TX is a partner program of the College Advising Corps (CAC) and a priority program of the current Texas strategic higher education plan, *60x30TX*. Advise TX is an innovative near-peer college access program that aims to increase the number of low-income, first-generation college, and other underrepresented students who enter and complete higher education. Advise TX had been sponsored by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) through the federal College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) and private entities, foundations, and businesses, including the CAC and Texas Higher Education Foundation (formerly the College for All Texans Foundation). Starting in 2015, the Advise TX program has been sponsored by state appropriation through the THECB, CAC, participating school districts, and private entities.

The program was started by the THECB in 2010 at the Institute for Public School Initiatives (IPSI), a part of The University of Texas at Austin's (UT-Austin) College of Education. The initial program placed 15 recent graduates of UT-Austin into service. Over the past few years, with grant funds from the THECB, the program has expanded up to a total of 120 advisers with five university chapter partners. Each chapter recruits, hires, and trains its own graduates to serve as advisers in selected partner high schools.

Advise TX places recent university graduates on high school campuses as near-peer college advisers to lead low-income and first-generation students to postsecondary education. Advise TX college advisers receive intensive training before serving in a high school, completing a four-to-six week practical curriculum that focuses on college access, college admissions, financial aid, student services, diversity, community service, and professionalism.

Advise TX advisers work in collaboration with high school counselors, teachers, and administrators to increase the proportion of students attending postsecondary public and private institutions of higher education, including community colleges and technical institutes. Advisers provide admissions and financial aid advising to students and their families through one-on-one and group sessions. Advisers help students identify colleges that will serve them well, complete admissions and financial aid applications, find the college that best fits their career aspirations and academic preparation, and help them enroll at the college or university they eventually choose.

In 2017-18, Advise TX advisers supported more than 40,000 high school seniors in applying to college and submitting more than 130,000 college applications in 8 regions and 46 school districts served by the program. For the class of 2017, advisers helped more than 29,000 seniors complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), thereby supporting students in being awarded \$476 million in institutional aid and scholarship dollars.

Responding to Rider 53

In response to Rider 53, III-58, General Appropriations Act, 85th Texas Legislature, Regular Session, which requires the THECB to report information regarding the effectiveness of the Advise TX program, the THECB, in coordination with the CAC, worked with Dr. Eric Bettinger, Associate Professor at Stanford University and Evaluation and Assessment Solutions for Education (EASE), to prepare a report on the impact of the Advise TX program on college-going rates. The report provides research and evaluation with an overview of five areas of research, including a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of Advise TX impact between 2012-16 and the programs impact on college enrollment and persistence, pathways to college, school culture, and advisers' attitudes and life choices.

Findings from the RCT 2012-16 study show Advise TX increased college enrollment rates by more than 3 percentage points, especially for low-income students. The size of the high school was found to be a mediating factor in the success of Advise TX. Advisers increase enrollment rates overall, but in large schools, the increased number of college attendees provides small percentage changes due to school size.

The evaluation shows the program demonstrated an increase in college enrollment and persistence rates. The average college enrollment rate of 50.7 percent for the class of 2017 represents a 2.02 percentage point increase over the enrollment rate for the class of 2016, which is equivalent to approximately 1,919 additional students enrolling between the classes of 2016 and 2017. Additionally, for the schools that first joined Advise TX in 2011-12 and have complete persistence data available, which captures a notable 53 of the current Advise TX schools, there is a 5 percentage point increase in average persistence rates between year one and year four, post-Advise TX partnerships, from 65 percent to 70 percent, respectively.

The evaluation shows an impact on school culture as well, which was assessed through qualitative methods, including multiple site visits to Advise TX-served schools and nonserved schools within the state. Data collected indicate that all stakeholders value and support the program. In schools where Advise TX is the only college access partner, 96 percent of high school counselors reported that the program has a significant or moderate effect on a schools' college-going culture.

In addition to the impact of the program at high schools served, the evaluation shows an impact on the advisers who serve in the Advise TX program. Annual survey data collected by CAC indicated that 80 percent of advisers felt satisfied or very satisfied with their overall experience and would recommend serving to others. Additionally, survey data showed that participation in the program yielded an increased likelihood of advisers both attending graduate school in the future and pursuing employment in the education sector, specifically.

The report on the impact of Advise TX on college-going rates fulfills the requirement for Rider 53, III-58. The report provides an overview of the effectiveness of the Advise TX program as it relates

to college enrollment, persistence, and pathways to college for the students being served by Advise TX advisers. In addition, the report highlights the impact on school culture and on the advisers themselves.

II. Introduction

Improving college access and completion is critical to reducing economic inequality within the United States and to increasing the United States' international competitiveness. Yet planning for, applying to, attending, and succeeding in college are not easy steps for many families. Many well-qualified students are currently discouraged from pursuing higher education by avoidable barriers, such as a lack of information about college admissions and financial aid. College advising is one of the key mechanisms by which policymakers, foundations, and high schools attempt to aid students as they navigate the college access "gauntlet."

This report focuses specifically on the effectiveness of one such effort, the Advise Texas (Advise TX), in response to Rider 53, III-58, which was enacted by the 85th Texas Legislature, Regular Session, and requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to provide a report to the Legislative Budget Board and the Office of the Governor. Research and evaluation on Advise TX were conducted by Stanford University, and the organization Evaluation and Assessment Solutions for Education (EASE).

Advise TX recruits and trains recent college graduates from partner higher education institutions. These recent college graduates serve as full-time advisers in the state's persistently lowest performing schools. Advise TX provides the support that high-need students need to navigate the complex processes of college admissions, matriculation, and securing financial aid. Advisers serve as full-time staff, working to foster a college-going culture within the schools they serve and directly providing peer advising to students one-on-one as part of the advisers' efforts to improve access to and persistence in higher education.

Although advisers serve all students at the school, their work primarily focuses on low-income and first-generation college students who, due to a lack of information and misperceptions about costs and aid, historically have not been finding their way to postsecondary education. Advisers offer direct support to students in the form of individual advising sessions, group sessions with students, and group sessions with students and parents. Typically, advisers assist seniors with the college search process, college application process, and financial aid process. This work can include encouraging students to consider a wide range of postsecondary options that take into account fit for the students; taking students on college visits; establishing timelines with students; applying for fee waivers; interpreting communications from colleges, such as offers of admission and financial aid; and a host of other general supports as students navigate the college admission and enrollment process.

Advisers also work with high school underclassmen to encourage them to consider and plan for higher education, including focusing on specific preparation activities such as studying for and taking the SAT or ACT. This report examines the effectiveness of Advise TX in all of these areas, as well as the impact of advisers on college enrollment and persistence.

Advise TX is one of the priority programs of the THECB and Texas Higher Education Foundation, a nonprofit that helps provide support for THECB programs, and is designed to meet the goals of

the state's higher education strategic plan, *60x30TX*. Partners in the project include four Texas institutions of higher education: The University of Texas at Austin (UT-Austin), Texas A&M University (TAMU), Texas Christian University (TCU), and Trinity University (Trinity). These universities train and place advisers in high-need high schools across Texas.

In addition, Advise TX partners with the national organization, College Advising Corps (CAC), which provides technical assistance for implementation. In 2010-11, the THECB contracted with the Institute of Public School Initiatives (IPSI) at UT-Austin to implement an Advise TX pilot with advisers placed at 15 high schools in three school districts. All of these schools had high percentages of Hispanic and/or African American students and more than 70 percent of their students were deemed economically disadvantaged (defined by qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, or receiving some other form of public assistance). IPSI was also charged with overseeing the statewide scale-up of Advise TX.

In 2017-18, UT-Austin, TAMU, TCU, and Trinity placed 112 advisers in 110 high schools across 44 districts in Texas. The enrollment counts at these schools totaled 49,814 seniors and 218,385 ninth- through 12th-grade students. At an average school, 90 percent of students were in populations underrepresented in higher education, with 70 percent of students identifying as Hispanic or Latino, 18 percent as black or African American, and 2 percent as Other or Multiracial. Students totaling 78 percent also qualified for free or reduced-price lunch.

Data and Outcomes of Interest

The evaluation of Advise TX first began in 2010-11, which was the first year of implementation in Texas. Evaluation activities have continued in the state through the 2018 high school graduating class. Multiple outcomes were examined to determine Advise TX's effectiveness using both quantitative and qualitative methods. This report provides an overview in five specific areas of research:

- 1) A randomized controlled trial (RCT) of Advise TX's impact between 2012-2016
- 2) The program's impact on college enrollment and persistence
- 3) The program's impact on the pathways to college
- 4) The program's impact on school culture
- 5) The program's impact on advisers' attitudes and life choices

The data for this comprehensive study came from Texas Education Agency (TEA) administrative data, surveys of students, surveys of advisers, and interviews from site visits conducted at partner school sites. The evaluation expanded in scope significantly in the 2011-12 academic year, with the rapid expansion of the program across the state, and continued through the 2015-16 academic year. When the Advise TX program planned its expansion after its initial pilot year, the THECB collaborated with the researchers to identify and randomly select high schools to receive the program. The RCT lasted until 2016 and relied on data from the THECB and the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC). Additionally, case studies, qualitative methods, adviser-reported activities, and surveys were used to investigate research areas about student pathways, school

culture, and the impact working as an adviser has on attitudes and life choices, respectively. Following the RCT, the evaluation continued to assess program impact using enrollment and persistence data from THECB and the NSC, as well as various surveys targeting students, advisers, and counselors.

III. TEXAS RCT: Advise TX 2012-2016

Overview of Impact Study

This section of the report focuses on an impact study in Texas between 2012-16. EASE conducted an RCT of Advise TX across the state beginning in the 2011-12 academic year. The RCT began with 36 treatment high schools starting Advise TX in 2011-12 and 75 control schools. The impact on enrollment focuses on the graduating class of 2012, looking at enrollment in college within three years of high school graduation. The experiment was expanded two additional years.

The RCT tests whether Advise TX had an impact on students' college enrollment outcomes with the highest standard of evidence. Starting in 2011-12, CAC collaborated with the THECB to conduct an RCT among Texas high schools. The RCT included 111 schools, of which 36 participated in Advise TX. The THECB identified a sampling frame of 418 high schools in the state using these criteria: 1) at least 35 percent free- or reduced-price-lunch participation, 2) fewer than 70 percent of graduating students attending college within a year, and 3) fewer than 55 percent of students experiencing a "distinguished" college-prep curriculum. These schools were invited to apply to participate in Advise TX, and 237 did so.

The 237 schools were ranked on the three criteria, as well as percent minority and a qualitative "fit" component, which was assigned a one to four value by staff based on the school's organizational capacity. All schools that applied were given an aggregate score based on these criteria, and the top 84 schools were automatically selected for the program. The next 111 schools were considered eligible for random assignment to the program and constitute the experimental sample. To ensure geographic diversity, the 111 schools were divided into 23 geographic regions, and a lottery was held within each region to select 36 treatment schools. The initial lottery occurred in 2011, and college enrollment was tracked over the next three years. Additional evidence of Advise TX impact was gathered from student surveys, adviser surveys, and administrator interviews at both treatment and control schools.

In addition, EASE conducted 16 case studies across 10 schools and longitudinal studies of six schools (three treatment, three control) with site visits in the first and third years of the program. They also chose four additional cases that were former program schools and conducted site visits of those schools in year two to gain insight into the possible cultural impact of program departure.

The RCT found that Advise TX led to significant improvements in college enrollment in Texas and were particularly strong among low-income students who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. In that group, college enrollment increased by over 3 percentage points.

The size of the school, it was found, is an important mediating factor in the success of Advise TX. Advisers move the overall enrollment rates at their school, but in large schools, the increased number of college attendees translates to small percentage changes given the large size of the schools. There is also evidence that the program more than pays for itself in terms of increased economic benefit to students and the state. Finally, stakeholders in schools report increased activity and services related to college advising, greater accessibility and visibility of college guidance work, and changes in school culture with regard to greater value and expectations for going to college.

Background Literature

Literature stretching back to the 1980s identifies inequities in guidance support to high school students (Lee & Ekstrom, 1987). Low-income and minority students are less likely to have access to guidance counselors who can advise qualified students to prepare for, apply to, and enroll in higher education (Avery & Kane, 2004). There is also evidence that information is related to college attendance as students who are more informed about financial aid are more likely to attend college (Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, 2004).

Guidance and support about specific components at specific stages of the college enrollment process improves enrollment. The H&R Block study demonstrated that providing assistance with completing the FAFSA improves aid receipt and enrollment (Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos, & Sanbonmatsu, 2012). There is also evidence that providing information via text messages during the summer before college prevents students who already intend to enroll from failing to show up in the fall (Castleman, Page, & Schooley, 2014; Castleman, Arnold, & Wartman, 2012).

However, previous studies do not focus on traditional college access programs that provide comprehensive information and guidance to students. It is possible that the lack of access to information and advising is a major cause of unequal college enrollments among wider populations of disadvantaged students, which college access programs attempt to ameliorate.

Unfortunately, there are very few studies of college access programs that employ rigorous experimental or quasi-experimental techniques. Of the 18 broadly defined college access programs that have been rigorously evaluated, 11 rely on some form of a quasi-experimental matching design to estimate the effects of the program (Maynard et al., 2014). In nearly all cases, the RCTs provide smaller impact estimates than the quasi-experimental studies, suggesting that matching techniques do not fully account for bias.

This report complements the existing literature by providing an evaluation of a large-scale implementation of a college access program across 111 schools and including more than 38,000 students. The program is a full-school model, potentially proving much more cost effective than many individual advising programs. Given the randomization of schools in Texas, this report could potentially provide the best evidence to date on the effectiveness of similar programs, as well as provide valuable insight on challenges and best practices associated with college access programs in other states.

Research Design and Data Sources

The primary design for the impact research is based on a randomized experiment across schools. Within regional blocks, schools were randomly selected to participate in the treatment. Such a design is among the strongest research designs in achieving internal validity in estimating the impacts of the programs. There are some limitations. First, the unit of analysis becomes the school, and the resulting study has less statistical power than an alternative design might have. Second, attrition of schools from Advise TX limits the statistical power by reducing compliance.

The primary outcome, college enrollment, is measured as a binary indicator, and results indicate the impact of the program on the probability that students enroll. Given the randomization, simple comparisons of control and treatment groups are used; however, this simple comparison is augmented with controls for the regional blocks used in the randomization process. (See Appendix I for a complete description of the research design and data sources.)

As mentioned above, EASE and CAC collaborated with the THECB to identify and randomly select high schools to receive the program. There were 111 schools that were eligible for random assignment to the program and constitute the experimental sample. To ensure geographic diversity, the 111 schools were divided into 23 geographic regions, and a lottery was held within each region to select treatment schools. Thirty-six schools were randomly chosen for treatment assignment out of the set of 111 across the regions. Three of the schools were admitted through a waiting list, which was formed from a randomized list of control schools across all regions.

Findings and Lessons Learned

There exists a statistically significant 2.2 percentage point increase in college enrollment at treatment schools. That effect is reduced and becomes statistically insignificant when adding covariates to the regression. Furthermore, there are positive but insignificant point estimates for black students and a 2 percentage-point effect on Hispanic students that is significant at the 5 percent level in the model with covariates. Larger effects of nearly 4 percentage points exist for low-income students, but as with the full sample, including covariates reduces that estimate to about 2 percentage points with a p-value of 0.103. Overall, Advise TX had a 1 to 3 percentage-point effect on college enrollment in its first year, concentrated among Hispanic and low-income populations.

This overall enrollment effect masks important differences in enrollment patterns across institutions. Larger treatment effects on enrollment are observed at two-year institutions than at four-year institutions. Overall, the program increased two-year college enrollment by 2.4 percentage points in its first year, with larger effects for Hispanic students, by 3.4 percentage points. In contrast, there is no movement in four-year college enrollment rates, with point estimates close to zero in each sample. The program's initial college enrollment effects are driven by increases in two-year college enrollment, and importantly, these effects are not at the cost of four-year enrollments. The program improves two-year enrollments without shifting students away from four-year colleges.

Given a lack of compliance to treatment assignment, the treatment effects reported above are larger for schools that actually had an adviser working in the school. A simple Wald estimator will inflate the intent to treat effects by about 33 percent, suggesting the effect of having an adviser at work in a Texas high school increases the two-year college enrollment rate by a little over 3 percentage points overall and by 4.5 percentage points for Hispanic students.

Cost-Benefit Analysis

EASE conducted an auxiliary analysis to identify the cost effectiveness of the program. Of special interest is the extent to which the program covered its costs. The point estimate on the effect of the treatment on two-year college enrollment suggests that 11.1 additional students per high school attended community college as a result of Advise TX. One can assume that all of the impact was at enrollment in community colleges, and that any college completion occurs within a six-year period after enrollment.

Relying on NSC reports, EASE converted the impact size into additional degrees. Considering transfer and degree attainment outcomes using Shapiro et al. (2017), the estimated impact of Advise TX in each school likely led to 1.0 new bachelor's degrees, 3.3 associate degrees, and 6.8 students with "some college." Combining these numbers with information on the increased annual earnings resulting from each of these education levels using data from the College Board (Ma, 2016), collective annual earnings for students at each Advise TX high school increase by \$93,902 per year once the induced students complete college. This implies that per adviser, the benefits of college generate a stream of about \$1.1 million in lifetime gains. Using less conservative assumptions, the stream is about \$1.8 million in lifetime gains.

The biggest cost to Advise TX is not the adviser costs. The average cost for the advisers is roughly \$59,000 per school, which includes salary and overhead. The largest cost is the foregone income from attending college. The 11.1 students who now attend college forego some earnings. Using College Board data (on returns to high school) and National Center for Education Statistics data (wages of currently enrolled college students), it is estimated that each student foregoes almost \$21,000 per year. This is likely an overestimate given the high unemployment rates of high school graduates who do not attend college in the years just after graduation, but it serves as a conservative estimate. As students drop out of college and join the workforce, these foregone wages decline. It is estimated that community college tuition and fees balance out with state and federal need-based financial aid programs given that most of the impact occurs with free or reduced-lunch students. One can then compute the lifetime increase in earnings by combining the costs and benefits.

With a conservative 5 percent discount rate, the present discounted value of the average lifetime gains per school per year is close to \$288,000. This is a conservative estimate for a variety of reasons. First, if one uses the NSC statistics for full-time students, then the estimated gain per school per year after college is closer to \$99,000. The same holds true if one uses the eight-year statistics for college completion. Second, high young adult unemployment and low entry wages should lower the foregone wages. Third, the assumption is that students currently enrolled after

six years will not complete a degree, and that no students will pursue any degree beyond a bachelor's degree. Finally, this also ignores any non-pecuniary benefits of college that would likely improve the returns for college (Oreopoulos & Petronijevic, 2013). If any of these assumptions are lifted, the estimated return swells.

Even with conservative estimates, there is an internal rate of return of just over 7 percent. With more liberal assumptions, the internal rate of return may be as high as 15 percent. This result is similar or better than the return to financial aid models. For example, Dynarski (2008) finds a 9 percent rate of return for Georgia Hope. Other financial aid programs such as the Ohio College Opportunity Grant (Bettinger, 2015) suggest returns that are closer to 1 percent. Additionally, with the additional taxes generated from the increased income, the program fully funds itself between 17 and 25 years after students graduate, which includes the foregone tax revenue the government had while students were studying.

IV. College Enrollment and Persistence Outcomes

This section provides an additional level of analysis of college enrollment and persistence outcomes beyond the specific focus of the RCT, providing an overview of results from the most recently available enrollment data for the graduating class of 2017. Additionally, this section provides a comparison of college enrollment trends between Advise TX and Texas schools overall going back to 2010. Finally, this section examines trends in college persistence among the Advise TX program schools between 2012 and 2016.

Class of 2017 College Enrollment Data

Across the 105 current Advise TX high schools for which college enrollment data are available (excluding schools in which the first year of partnership was 2017-18), an average¹ of 50.7 percent of Texas graduating seniors in the Class of 2017 enrolled in college (immediately after high school graduation at an in-state institution). An average of 24.5 percent of graduates enrolled in an in-state four-year institution, and an average of 26.2 percent of graduates enrolled in an in-state two-year institution.

The average college enrollment rate of 50.7 percent for the class of 2017 represents a 2.02 percentage point increase over the enrollment rate for the class of 2016, which is equivalent to approximately 1,919 additional students enrolling between the classes of 2016 and 2017. This increase represents the largest year-over-year increase in average enrollment rates since the Advise TX program began in 2010. In comparison, Texas statewide college enrollment rates increased by only 0.4 percent between the classes of 2016 and 2017².

¹ The enrollment rate at each current Advise TX high school was calculated and rates across these schools were averaged to represent the overall Advise TX average college enrollment rate. The average Advise TX enrollment rate calculation only accounts for schools that are currently served through the Advise TX program. Any former Advise TX schools that are not currently served were excluded from the calculation.

² Data provided by THECB.

Twenty districts saw increases of at least 3 percentage points in the average college enrollment rate between the classes of 2016 and 2017. The Lake Worth district saw the greatest average increase at 23 percentage points, followed by the Harlandale, Harlingen, and Hidalgo districts at 8 percentage points each. Table 1 captures data for all districts that had at least a 3 percentage point increase in the average college enrollment rate.

Table 1. Average Increase in College Enrollment Rates by District - Classes of 2016 to 2017

District Name	Average College Enrollment Rate: Class of 2016	Average College Enrollment Rate: Class of 2017	Average Increase in College Enrollment Rates: Class of 2016 to Class of 2017	Number of District Schools Served Through Advise TX
Lake Worth ISD	35%	58%	+23% pts	1
Harlandale ISD	53%	61%	+8% pts	2
Harlingen ISD	52%	60%	+8% pts	1
Hidalgo ISD	74%	82%	+8% pts	1
Lancaster ISD	45%	53%	+7% pts	1
Alief ISD	40%	47%	+7% pts	3
Los Fresnos CISD	46%	52%	+6% pts	1
Brenham ISD	60%	66%	+6% pts	1
Southwest ISD	39%	45%	+6% pts	1
Birdville ISD	55%	60%	+5% pts	1
San Marcos CISD	39%	44%	+5% pts	1
North East ISD	43%	48%	+5% pts	4
Klein ISD	51%	56%	+4% pts	1
Brownsville ISD	51%	56%	+4% pts	5
La Joya ISD	49%	53%	+4% pts	3
DeSoto ISD	53%	56%	+3% pts	1
Socorro ISD	58%	61%	+3% pts	3
Bryan ISD	47%	50%	+3% pts	2
Garland ISD	35%	38%	+3% pts	1
Edgewood ISD	34%	37%	+3% pts	2

The top 20 districts with overall highest average college enrollment rates for the Class of 2017 are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Average College Enrollment Rates for the Class of 2017, Top 20 Districts

District Name	Average College Enrollment Rate: Class of 2017	Number of District Schools Served by Advise TX
Hidalgo ISD	82%	1
KIPP	72%	4
Brenham ISD	66%	1
PSJA ISD	62%	4
Harlandale ISD	61%	2
Socorro ISD	61%	3
Birdville ISD	60%	1
Harlingen CISD	60%	1
Richardson ISD	59%	1
Lake Worth ISD	58%	1
Duncanville ISD	58%	1
DeSoto ISD	56%	1
Klein ISD	56%	1
Brownsville ISD	56%	5
Katy ISD	55%	2
Grand Prairie ISD	54%	3
La Joya ISD	53%	3
Lancaster ISD	53%	1
Cypress-Fairbanks ISD	53%	1
Lancaster ISD	53%	1

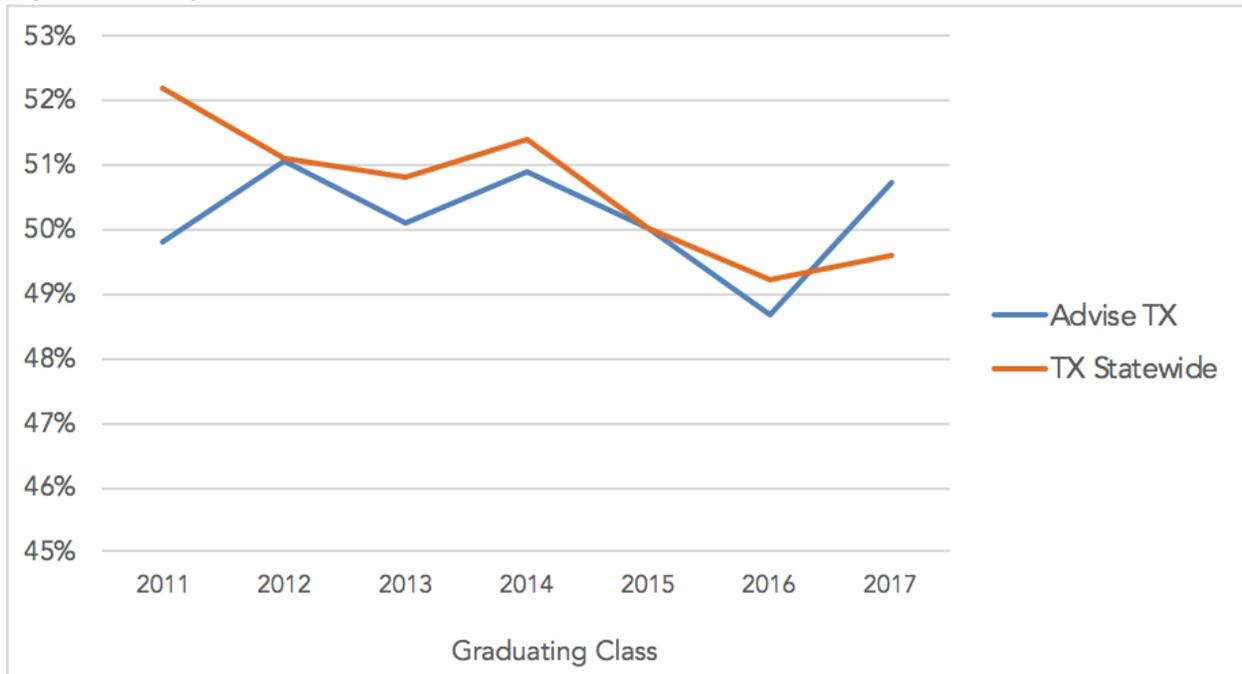
Trends Over Time in College Enrollment Data

Average college enrollment rates at Advise TX schools have roughly followed trends observed in Texas statewide college enrollment rates (Figure 1, page 10).³ College enrollment rates at both Advise TX and Texas schools statewide steadily decreased for the graduating classes of 2014 through 2016. Enrollment rates at Advise TX schools decreased by an average of 2.2 percentage

³ College enrollment rate calculations for Advise TX schools represent overall program averages accounting for schools currently served, while enrollment rate calculations for Texas statewide represent student totals.

points during this time period – the same magnitude of change experienced at Texas schools statewide. Most recent enrollment rates for the class of 2017 represent an upward trend for both Advise TX and Texas schools statewide; however, Advise TX schools saw a greater increase over the class of 2016, at an average of 2.02 percentage points, compared to the 0.4 percentage point increase in Texas schools statewide.

Figure 1. College Enrollment Rates Over Time: Advise TX Schools and Texas Schools Statewide



CAC measures college enrollment progress over a baseline rate for each Advise TX high school. Baseline college enrollment rates are calculated by taking an average of the enrollment rates in years immediately preceding the CAC/Advise TX partnership. For the majority of schools, three years of pre-Advise TX enrollment data were used to calculate baseline rates, though in some cases only one or two years of pre-Advise TX enrollment rate data were available. Data capturing change from the baseline college enrollment rate to post-Advise TX-partnership years are most representative at the one year- and two year-post Advise TX partnership points in time, as 99 of the 110 current Advise TX schools (only excluding schools that began in 2016-17 and later) are captured within these frames.

Across the 99 current Advise TX schools that partnered before 2016-17 – and thus have one-year and two-year, post-Advise TX partnership data – 97 of 99 have complete data available for trend analysis. At these schools, college enrollment rates stayed roughly flat compared to baseline after years one and two of Advise TX programs. The average baseline college enrollment rate in these 97 schools is 52 percent, and the average college enrollment rate after Advise TX partnership after both year one and year two is 51 percent.

Given that the vast majority of schools in this sample first partnered with Advise TX during 2010-11 or 2011-12, and therefore had year one and year two post-Advise TX partnership college enrollment rates measured during a time in which national college enrollment rates⁴ and/or Texas state college enrollment rates⁵ were decreasing, the overall sample's relatively flat college enrollment rates after the first two years of Advise TX partnership are a success.

Particularly promising trend data are observed for the cohorts of Advise TX schools that first partnered in 2014-15 and 2015-16. Among schools first joining the program in 2014-15, the average college enrollment rate increased by 2 percentage points over baseline, to 56 percent, after the third year of the program. Similarly, among schools first joining in 2015-16, after the second year, the average college enrollment rate increased by 1 percentage point over baseline.

When looking across all Advise TX schools for which data is available to compare baseline college enrollment rates to year-three college enrollment rates, schools with a total student size of 1,500 students or fewer, on average, experience a 2 percentage-point increase over baseline following the third year of Advise TX. These findings agree with the preliminary findings from the RCT study, which indicated that Advise TX may be most effective in smaller schools.

Persistence Data

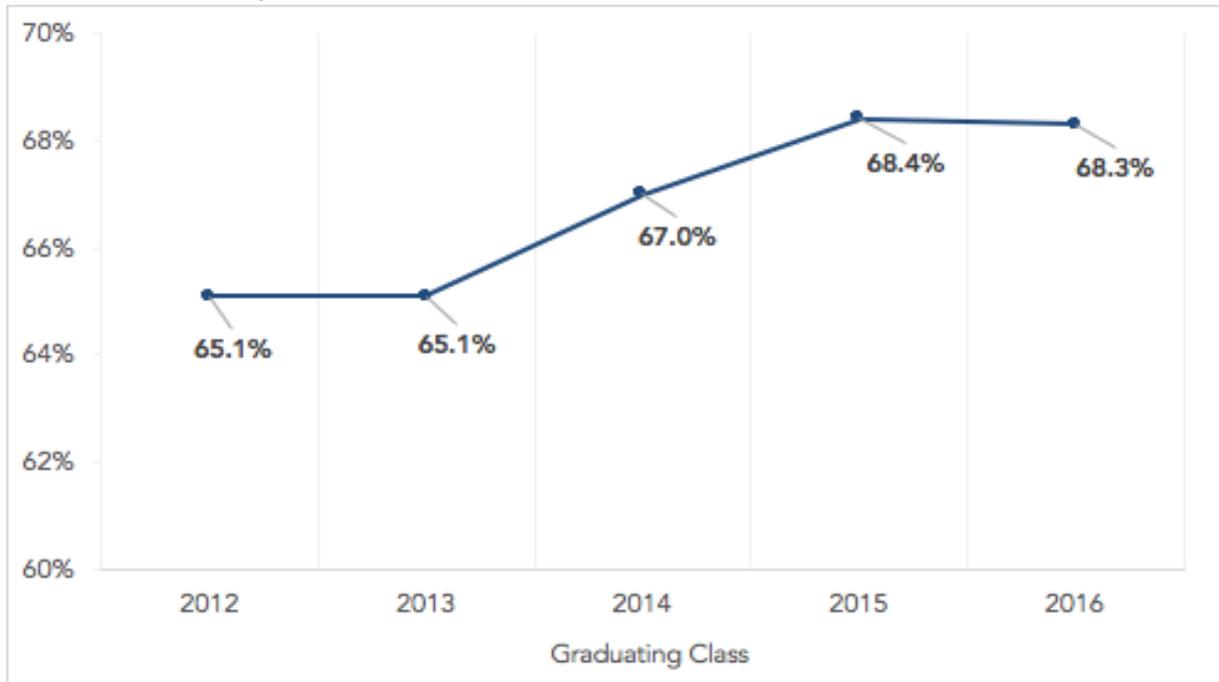
Persistence rate data were provided by the THECB and represent one-year persistence rates for enrollments immediately after high school graduation at in-state institutions. The rates capture students that were enrolled at any Texas institution that reports to THECB, including independent institutions of higher education. Persistence rate data capturing one-year rates for the classes of 2012 through 2016 were available for analysis.

Looking across current Advise TX high schools that have complete persistence rate data for the graduating classes of 2012 through 2016 (cohorts of schools first joining the program in 2010-11 or 2011-12), over time the average persistence rate has increased by an average of 3 percentage points from 65 percent for the class of 2012 to 68 percent for the class of 2016 (Figure 2, page 12).

⁴ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2016). Table 302.10: Recent high school completers and their enrollment in two-year and four-year colleges, by sex: 1960 through 2015. In U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (Ed.), Digest of Education Statistics (2016 ed.). Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_302.10.asp.

⁵ Data provided by THECB.

Figure 2. Average One-Year Persistence Rates by Graduating Class (Advise TX Schools First Partnering in 2010-11 and 2011-12)



For schools that first joined Advise TX in 2011-12 and have complete persistence data available, which captures a notable 53 of the current Advise TX schools, there is a 5 percentage point increase in average persistence rates between year one and year four, post-Advise TX partnerships, from 65 percent to 70 percent, respectively (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Average One-Year Persistence Rates for Advise TX Cohort 2011-12



V. Advise TX Impact on Student Pathways

There are many barriers and challenges associated with applying to college, such as selecting which colleges to apply to, preparing the necessary documents for application, and ultimately helping students advance to college. Students must complete a set of steps in order to attend college. These steps include items such as preparing for college, formulating expectations about college, preparing college applications, applying for college, taking college entrance exams, completing college financial aid forms, and selecting a college. If students complete these steps, they can attend college. Families and schools can help students accomplish these steps; however, despite their best efforts, some of the steps remain uncompleted. Advise TX inserts a full-time adviser to assist students with the entire process. Helping students through these intermediary steps is a key area of impact for the program.

This section explores whether Advise TX advisers are effective at supporting students in the completion of college admissions milestones such as college application submission and FAFSA completion. For example, in 2017-18 advisers across Texas were successful in supporting thousands of students with the college application process. Collectively, advisers:

- held 188,000 one-on-one meetings with 41,000+ (85%) seniors – 70 percent of seniors in partner high schools met with the Advise TX adviser at least three times;
- assisted 76 percent of seniors in registering for the ACT or SAT;
- supported 40,000+ (84%) seniors in applying to college and submitting more than 130,000 college applications;
- helped 29,000+ seniors complete the FAFSA; and
- supported students with being awarded \$476 million in institutional aid and scholarship dollars.

Tracking these types of college admissions milestones has been an evaluation focus for Advise TX since its inception, using student surveys to assess the program's impact on these outcomes. This section will focus on student survey results between 2015-16 and 2017-18, as the evaluation focused on surveying a random selection of schools to better track progress on various measures.

Student Survey

The senior student survey gives Advise TX advisers an opportunity to track student knowledge, behaviors, and decisions related to college. These data help identify specific steps that students have taken on the pathway to college, as well as key indicators related to college attendance such as FAFSA completion. The survey also provides insights into students' motivation to continue their education. Typically advisers administer the anonymous survey in senior English classes or, if possible, during a senior assembly. The goal is at least a 70 percent completion rate based on the spring senior enrollment number.

The instrument is two pages long with five types of questions: (1) demographic information, including grade, parental education, ethnicity, and gender; (2) postsecondary aspirations;

(3) college preparation activities; (4) school culture; and (5) college and financial aid knowledge. Specifically, the first category captures factors related to student habitus; the second category includes measures of the resultant influence of all contexts on students' outlook on college; the third are indicators of behaviors along the pathway related to school and local contexts; the fourth are indicators of the college-going culture at their high school; and the fifth measures knowledge emanating from the federal policy context.

Students were surveyed April through June, when they were far enough along in the planning process that they likely had a clear idea of whether and where they would attend college in the coming year. In addition to asking students about their college plans, students were asked to reflect on their academic preparation throughout high school. Finally, students were asked about what college-going information they received and from whom they received it. Table 3 provides an overview of the number of schools and students in 2016-17 by program. Table 4 (page 15) provides the demographic characteristics of survey respondents in 2016-17.

Table 3. Student Responses by Program 2016-2017

Program	Number of Schools	Seniors Surveyed
TAMU	14	5,603
TCU	8	2,456
Trinity	5	1,374
UT-Austin	6	1,948
Total	33	11,381

Table 4. Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents 2016-2017

Female	53%
First-Generation College Student^a	76%
Race	
African American/black	25%
Asian	6%
Caucasian/white	12%
Native American	2%
Hispanic/Latino	60%
Multiracial	6%
Underrepresented Minority^b	85%
Low Math Track (Algebra 1, Algebra 2, Geometry)	73%
Median Math Track (Pre-calculus, Probability/Statistics)	23%
High Math Track (Calculus)	4%
Met with Advise TX Adviser	80%

- Note: Percentages exclude students with missing data. Students could identify as more than one race.
- a - Neither parent has a bachelor’s degree; b - African American/black, Hispanic, or Native American.

The Adviser Difference

Analysis of the survey compares students who met with an Advise TX adviser at their school with those who did not meet with the adviser, based upon responses to the student survey. It should be noted that these are not causal analyses. While the differences reported here could be attributable to the students’ interactions with the adviser, these data cannot be used to make causal claims. It is possible that those students who engage most in college preparation activities and who want to apply to college seek out the adviser rather than those behaviors being a result of meetings with advisers. Statistically significant differences between students who have met with an adviser and those have not met with the adviser on various demographics, college preparation, and knowledge measures, as well as applications and acceptances, are reported below.⁶

Compared to *seniors* who did not meet with the Advise TX adviser, **students who met with the Advise TX adviser were:**

- 19.7 percent more likely to visit a college or university
- 25.1 percent more likely attend a college fair or a workshop related to college information

⁶A linear probability model was employed, which predicts meeting with an adviser as a function of a given covariate. The statistical analysis presented does not include controls unless otherwise noted.

- 17.2 percent more likely to take ACT/SAT prep courses
- 27.4 percent more likely to attend financial aid workshops
- 27.7 percent more likely to apply for a scholarship
- 18.3 percent more likely to take a college class for credit
- 15.3 percent more likely to take an AP Test
- 11.9 percent more likely to take the ACT
- 13.8 percent more likely to take the SAT I
- 14.0 percent more likely to take the SAT II
- 31.7 percent more likely to submit the FAFSA

*In terms of college applications and acceptances, compared to seniors who did not meet with the Advise TX adviser at their school, **students who met with the Advise TX adviser were:***

- 30.3 percent more likely to apply to a college/university
- 30.0 percent more likely to apply to three or more institutions
- 30.0 percent more likely to apply to a four-year institution of higher education
- 19.5 percent more likely to apply to a two-year institution of higher education
- 9.6 percent more likely to be accepted to a college/university
- 16.7 percent more likely to be accepted to three or more colleges
- 24.1 percent more likely to be accepted to a four-year institution of higher education

Students who meet with advisers are more likely than those who do not to be African American and underrepresented minorities in higher education, but there are no statistically significant differences in who meets with an adviser by first-generation status. While first-generation and underrepresented minority students may need more support to navigate the complicated application and financial aid process, these results suggest that advisers are meeting with a diverse population of students. Compared to students who have not met with an adviser, students who have met with an adviser are more likely to have participated in many intermediate college-going activities including: visiting colleges, attending workshops, taking college-level courses and test-preparation courses, and submitting the FAFSA.

Finally, one of the primary ways in which advisers help students is applying to college. There are several significant differences for students who meet with the adviser compared to those who do not, including not just submitting applications but submitting multiple applications, applying to a four-year college, and applying to a first-choice college. Students who meet with an adviser are more likely to be accepted and more likely to be accepted to multiple institutions than those who did not meet with an adviser.

Closing the Gap

The student survey also allows a “closing the gap” analysis employing a difference-in-difference model. These analyses examine how the gaps between student subgroups differ among students who interacted with the Advise TX adviser and among those who did not in key areas such as FAFSA, college applications, and acceptances.⁷

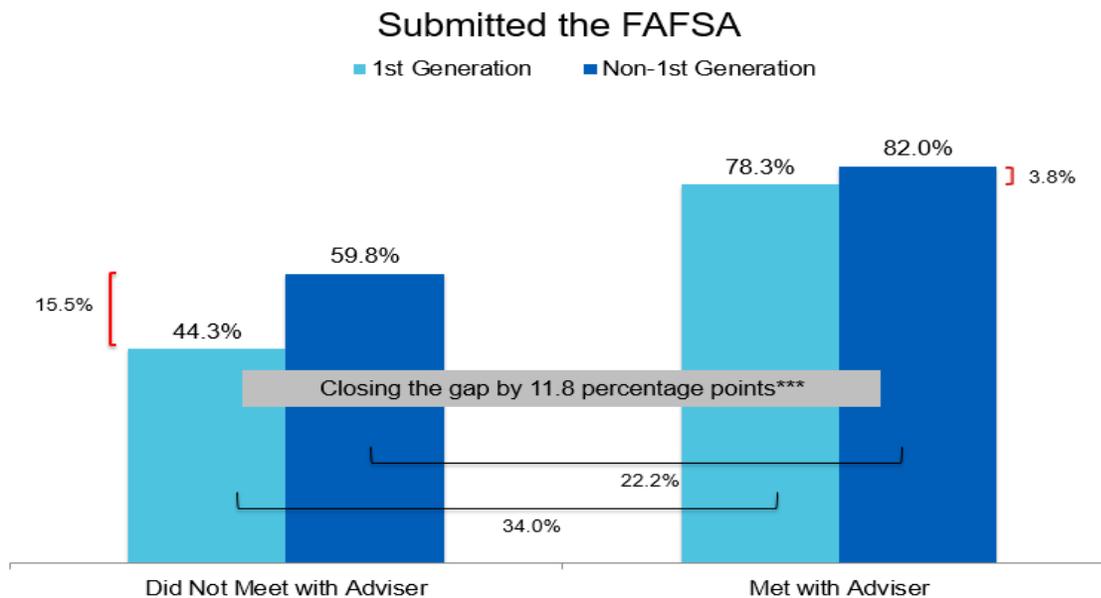
⁷ Significance is noted by *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$. The figures include conditional means from a difference-in-difference model.

In some cases, the gap is not only closed but reversed. The gap reverses when, for example, underrepresented minority students who meet with an Advise TX adviser are more likely to complete a college-going task than non-underrepresented students who met with the adviser. An example of this is seen in Figure 4.1.

First-Generation vs. Non-First-Generation

When comparing the difference between first-generation and non-first-generation students among students who did and did not meet with the Advise TX adviser, the gap in applying for FAFSA is closed by 11.8 percentage points.

Figure 4.1.



When demographic controls are added to the regression, the gap closes by 10.9 percentage points. Adding school fixed effects with the demographic controls the gap closure is 9.4 percentage points.

Interpreting the Gap Figures. Figure 4.1 provides four data points:

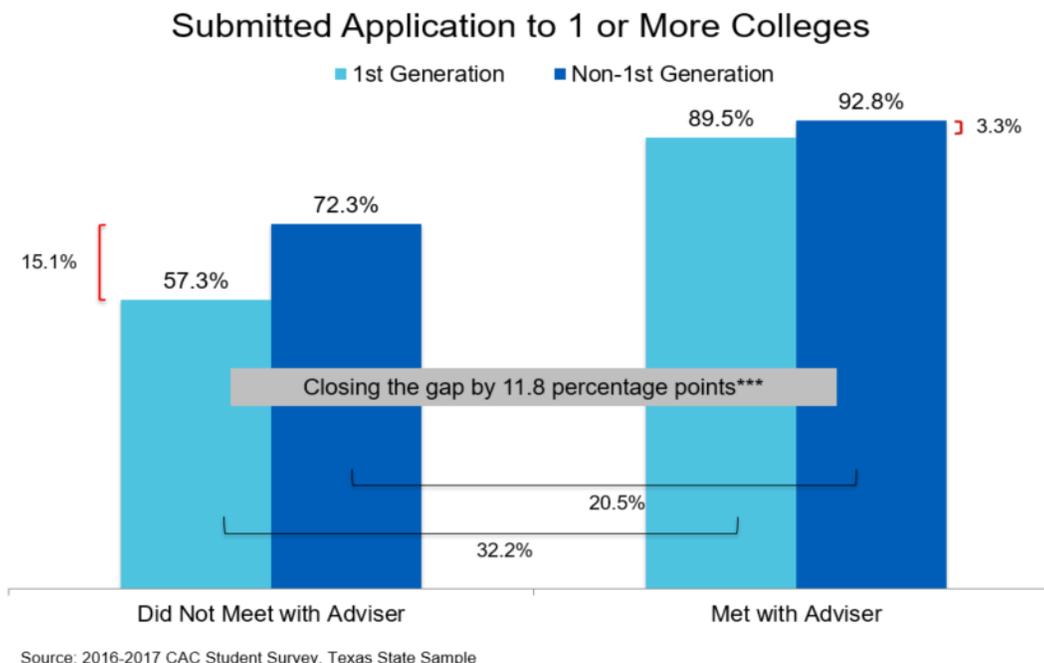
First-Generation Never Met with Adviser (44.3%)	First-Generation Met with Adviser (78.3%)
Non-first-Generation Never Met with Adviser (59.8%)	Non-first-Generation Met with Adviser (82.0%)

The horizontal “gap brackets” in Figure 4.1 demonstrate non-first-generation students have a 22.2 percent difference in the likelihood of applying for FAFSA if they have met with an Advise TX adviser. In comparison, first-generation students who met with an Advise TX adviser are 34.0 percent more likely to apply for FAFSA than first-generation students who did not meet with an adviser.

The red “gap brackets” demonstrate that the difference in this same metric between first-generation and non-first-generation students who have never met with an Advise TX adviser is 15.5 percentage points. In comparison, the difference is only 3.8 percentage points among those who have met with an adviser. This is another way of showing the same 11.8 percentage point closing of the gap.

When comparing the differences between first-generation and non-first-generation students among students who did and did not meet with the Advise TX adviser, the gap in submitting an application to one or more colleges is closed by 11.8 points (Figure 4.2).

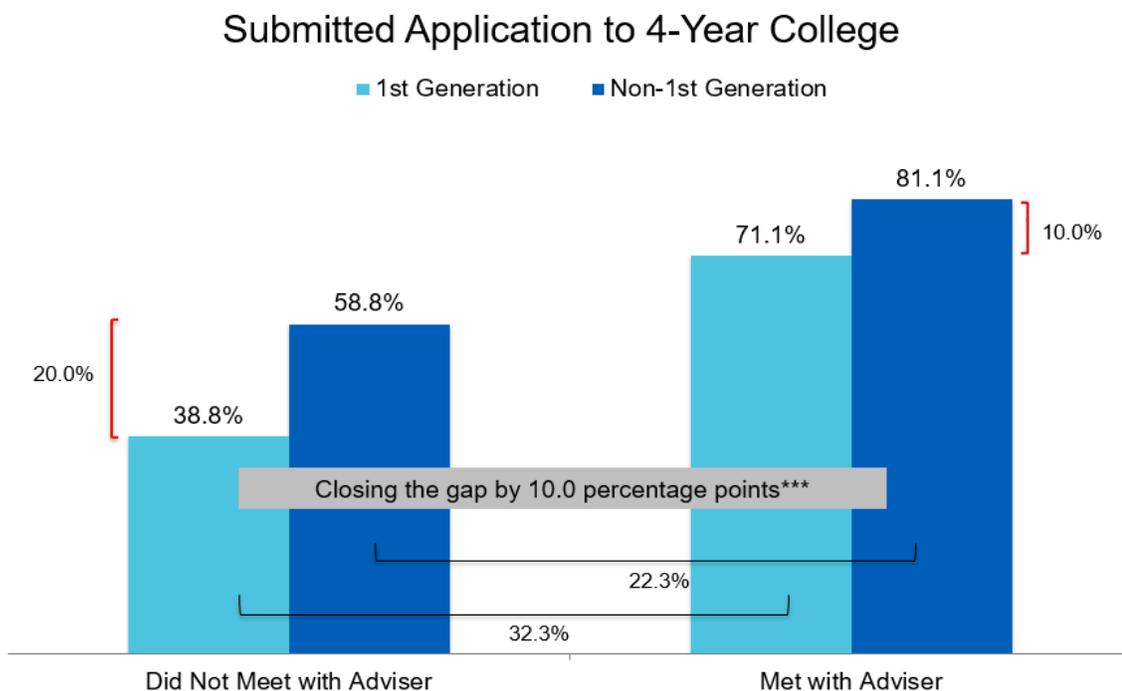
Figure 4.2.



The gap closes by 11.2 percentage points and 10.2 percentage points when adding demographic controls and then additionally adding school fixed effects.

When comparing the difference between first-generation and non-first-generation students among students who did and did not meet with the Advise TX adviser, the gap in submitting an application to a four-year college is closed by 10.0 percentage points (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3.



Source: 2016-2017 CAC Student Survey, Texas State Sample

When demographic controls are added to the regression, the gap closed by 9.5 percentage points. Adding school fixed effects with the demographic controls, the gap closure is 9.1 percentage points.

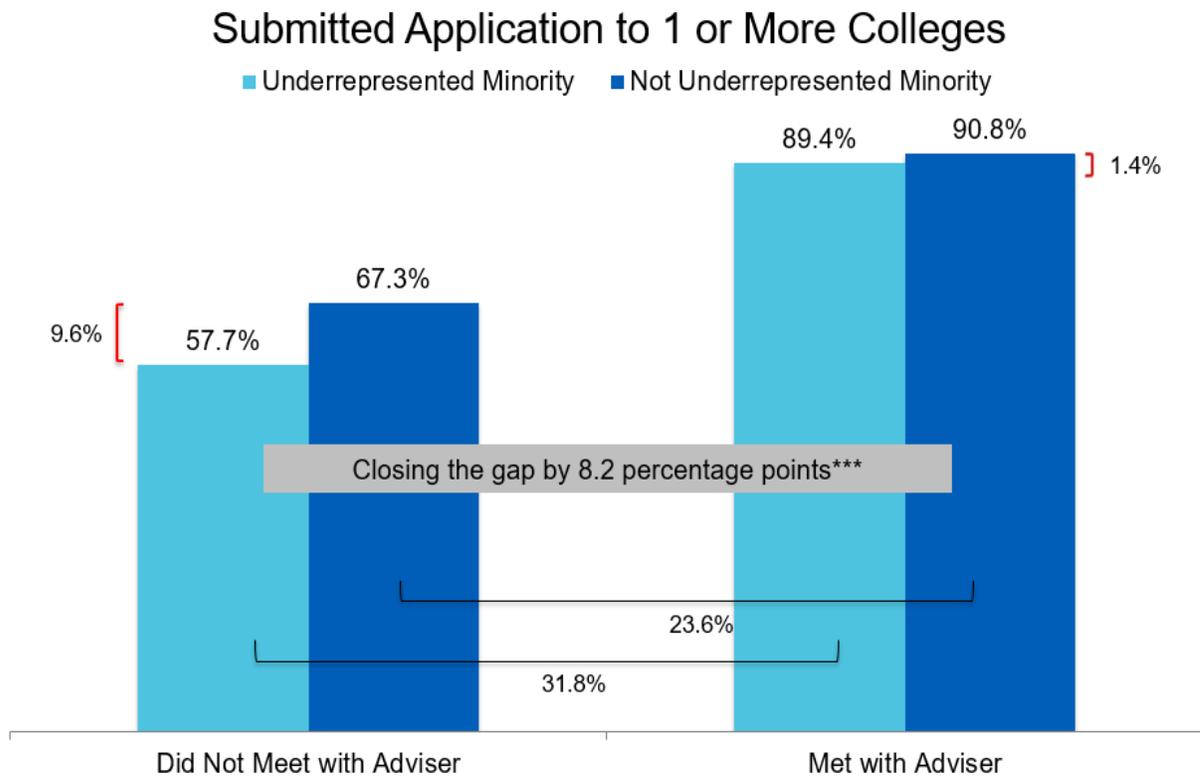
Additionally, when comparing the difference between first-generation and non-first-generation students among students who did and did not meet with the Advise TX adviser:

- The gap in visiting a college or university is closed by 7.6 percentage points.
 - The gap in viewing a college website is closed by 6.2 percentage points.
 - The gap in taking a class for college credit is closed by 6.7 percentage points.
 - The gap in taking a vocational class leading to a certificate is reversed by 9.8 percentage points.
 - The gap in taking the PSAT is closed by 9.0 percentage points.
 - The gap in taking an AP test is closed by 9.6 percentage points.
 - The gap in reporting feeling “very familiar” with the FAFSA is closed by 7.4 percentage points.
 - The gap in reporting “knowing more about college than at the beginning of the year” is closed by 4.7 percentage points.

Underrepresented Minority vs. Non-Underrepresented Minority Students

When comparing the difference between minority students underrepresented in higher education and non-underrepresented minority students among students who have and have not met with the Advise TX adviser, the gap in submitting an application to one or more colleges is closed by 8.2 percentage points (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1.



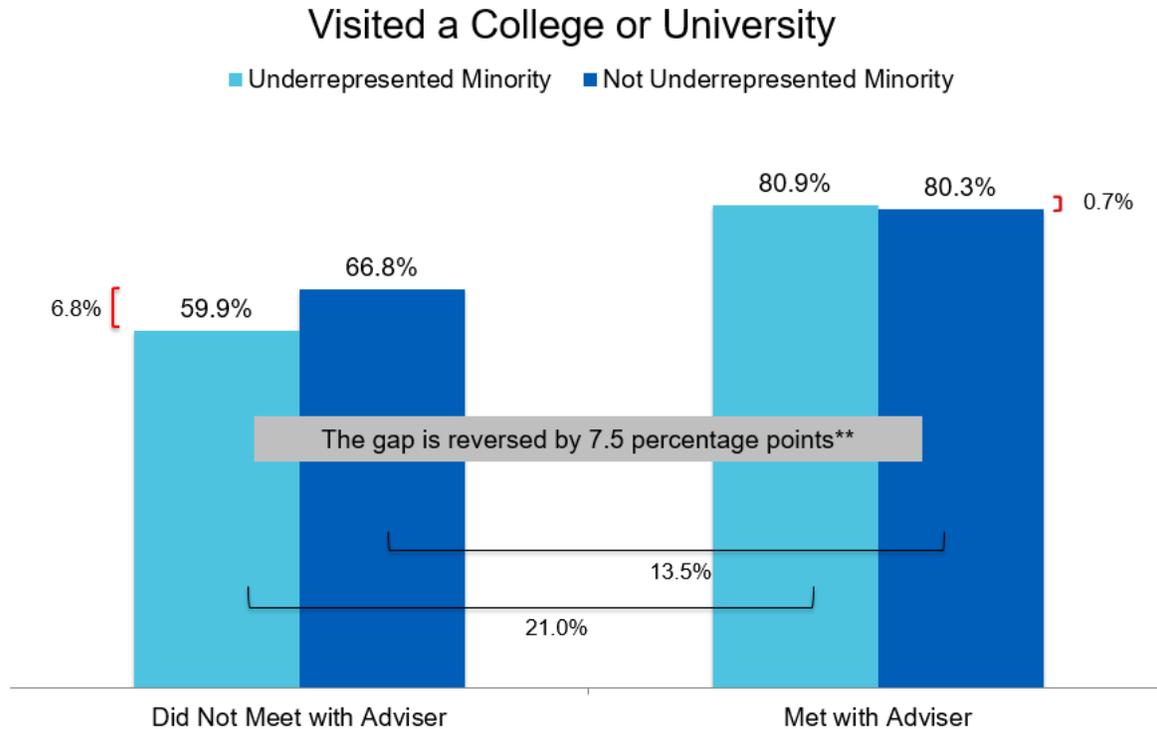
Source: 2016-2017 CAC Student Survey, Texas State Sample

The gap closes by 10.0 percentage points and 8.6 percentage points when adding demographic controls and then additionally adding school fixed effects.

When comparing the difference between underrepresented minority and non-underrepresented minority students among students who have and have not met with the Advise TX adviser:

The gap in visiting a college or university is reversed by 7.5 percentage points** (Figure 5.2, page 21)

Figure 5.2.



Source: 2016-2017 CAC Student Survey, Texas State Sample

When demographic controls are added to the regression, the gap closed by 5.9 percentage points. Adding school fixed effects with the demographic controls, the gap closure is 5.3 percentage points.

Additionally, when comparing the difference between underrepresented minority and non-underrepresented minority students among students who did not and did meet with an Advise TX adviser:

- The gap in taking the PSAT is closed by 13.6 percentage points.
- The gap in taking the ACT is closed by 7.7 percentage points.
- The gap in being accepted to four-year college (conditional on applying) is closed by 7.3 percentage points.

There are two ways to interpret these “Closing the Gap” findings. These analyses demonstrate that the odds of applying to college(s), applying to four-year colleges, and being accepted to college increase more for first-generation students and minority students underrepresented in higher education when they have met with an adviser than for those who have not. These analyses also demonstrate that among first-generation students and underrepresented minority students, their odds of being prepared for college, applying to college, and being accepted to college are greater for those who have met with an Advise TX adviser compared to those who have not.

Perception of Advisers and Program

In addition to surveying students regarding their experience with Advise TX, school counseling staff were surveyed to assess their perceptions of the advisers and the program overall. Given the close working relationship between the college advisers and the counselors at their respective high schools, this group of stakeholders provides key insights into the advisers’ job performances and program functioning. The following section overviews some of the findings from the 2017 and 2018 counselor survey, which was administered online to all Advise TX schools via Qualtrics. In particular, the analysis focuses on four of the survey questions pertaining to counselors’ perceptions. Table 5 provides the number of counselor survey responses by school and completed surveys for 2017 and 2018.

Table 5. Counselor survey response rates

2017		2018	
No. of schools	No. of completed surveys	No. of schools	No. of completed surveys
80	119	57	91

The first and second areas of analysis focus on counselors’ perceptions of adviser characteristics. Counselors were asked to rate the advisers on 17 characteristics deemed crucial to being a successful adviser within a school. These characteristics range from being approachable to engaged in school activities to being data-driven. Counselors were asked to rate the advisers using a five-point Likert scale, with a rating of 5 meaning that the adviser always exhibits the characteristic and a rating of 1 meaning the adviser never exhibits the characteristic. Second, counselors were asked to rank the top three characteristics they deem most essential to being a successful adviser. In 2017, on average, 86 percent of Texas high school counselors rated the advisers as always or very often exhibiting the 17 characteristics, and in 2018, on average, 93 percent of Texas counselors rated the advisers as always or very often exhibiting the characteristics.

For the third area of analysis, counselors in schools were asked to rate the overall effectiveness of the program on various outcomes (e.g., the number of students reached within the school) relative to other college access organizations working in their high schools. Counselors again rated the program on a five-point Likert scale, with a rating of 5 meaning the program is far above average in terms of its effectiveness relative to other programs and a rating of 1 meaning the program is far below average in its effectiveness relative to other programs (Table 6, page 23).

Table 6. Counselors’ rating of impact of the Advise TX program

	<i>Percent of counselors who rated the program’s impact as above average</i>	
	<i>2017 n=79</i>	<i>2018 n=68</i>
<i>College-going culture outcome</i>		
<i>The number of students reached within the school</i>	84.81	91.18
<i>The college-going culture of the school</i>	74.69	82.36
<i>College enrollment outcomes (how many students will be attending college)</i>	72.15	80.88
<i>Financial aid outcomes (e.g., how many students complete a FAFSA, scholarship dollars awarded)</i>	75.95	82.35
<i>College preparation outcomes (e.g., how many students complete a college application, how many students take the SAT/ACT)</i>	75.95	83.82

Finally, for schools where the Advise TX program is the only college access program in operation, counselors were asked to rate the overall impact of the program. Counselors rated the program on a four-point Likert scale, with a rating of 4 meaning the program has a significant impact on various outcomes and a rating of 1 meaning the program has had no impact (Table 7, page 24). In 2017 and 2018, counselors in schools with other college access organizations rated the program as having the greatest impact on the number of students reached within the school. As a whole-school model program that works with any student, this finding is a testament to the program’s approach, and one of the key differences between the program’s operations relative to other college access organizations that typically work with a subset of students. In 2017, counselors in schools that only partner with Advise TX felt that the program’s greatest impact was on financial aid and college preparation outcomes, whereas the 2018 counselors felt that the greatest impact was on the number of students reached within the school, the college-going culture, and college enrollment outcomes. Overall, though, counselors in these types of schools rate the overall impact of the program quite highly.

Table 7. Counselors’ rating of impact of the Advise TX program

<i>In schools with no other college access organizations:</i>	<i>Percent of counselors who rated the program’s impact as significant or moderate</i>	
	<i>2017 n=28</i>	<i>2018 n=23</i>
<i>College-going culture outcome</i>		
<i>The number of students reached within the school</i>	92.85	100
<i>The college-going culture of the school</i>	92.86	100
<i>College enrollment outcomes (how many students will be attending college)</i>	89.28	100
<i>Financial aid outcomes (e.g., how many students complete a FAFSA, scholarship dollars awarded)</i>	96.43	95.66
<i>College preparation outcomes (e.g., how many students complete a college application, how many students take the SAT/ACT)</i>	96.43	95.66

VI. Advise TX Impact on School Culture

Case studies conducted at both partner and non-partner high schools have been another ongoing component of the EASE evaluation of Advise TX effectiveness. Qualitative case study data supplements the quantitative data by providing a more in-depth perspective of the interaction between Advise TX advisers, school staff, students, and parents; the values and priorities of various stakeholders (staff, students, families); and the extent to which collaboration and coordination of college-prep activities allow greater reach of the college-going culture of the school across grade levels and achievement. It is this experiential aspect of the program that is important to understand if it is to have an impact on college-going culture. Specifically, in what way is the program disrupting, complementing, or enhancing the college behavior, activities, and attitudes of the different stakeholders that it touches/serves?

Since Advise TX started in the state, several rounds of case studies have been conducted, both prior to and during the RCT (2010-11, 2014, and 2016). Prior to the RCT, the case studies focused more on providing an in-depth description of program operations and functioning within schools. The case studies conducted during the RCT allowed exploration of the program’s impact on college-going culture through a comparison with program and non-program schools. This section of the report provides an overview of the key takeaways from the site visits in terms of Advise TX’s impact on a high school’s college-going culture. For a complete description of the case studies, data sources, and findings, please see Appendix II.

Summary of Case Studies 2010 and 2011

Centrality of Adviser. In these initial case studies, many school staff members indicated that the advisers played a central role in terms of college advising and that the advisers were providing a different type of service at the school. For example, at School 1, the counselors characterized the adviser as the “glue” that held all of the college advising efforts together within the school. This particular school had had multiple programs, such as GEAR UP, Project Stay, and Communities in Schools for several years, but the counselors described the adviser as the “missing” piece that brought these disparate efforts together. Similarly, the principal said she worked “very closely” with the adviser and considered the adviser to have made a real impact on the school in a way these other programs had not.

Even at one of the schools where the program had only been operating for several weeks, school staff members spoke similarly about the central role that the adviser is playing already. At School 8, the adviser described the situation as somewhat different from the other schools visited in the state because there had never been other college advising programs within the school. In that sense, the mere idea of having an extra resource to devote to college preparation was very exciting for some of the staff members. One teacher commented:

“As a teacher when we were going through staff development the first week I had never been so excited about anything in my life as to find out that there was a person that had that much energy and that much knowledge . . . [the adviser] made such an impression upon us.”

Schools 1 and 8 are examples of sites where the adviser played a more central role in the college advising process, but at other sites, the adviser was not in a central role. Specifically, in several of the schools, the adviser’s role was more of an extension of the current practices already undertaken by the staff. For example, at School 3 there was already an active college advising team at the school prior to the Advise TX adviser’s arrival. The adviser was thus able to reach students who might otherwise not have received help. As one teacher noted:

“I had a student that was ready to not go to college because they couldn’t figure out the website at [Houston Community College] . . . You know, ‘I can’t figure out my FAFSA. I can’t set up my password, so I’ll just not go to college.’ I mean, very, to me, startling and if that office or [the adviser] wasn’t there, I’m deadly serious, I don’t know who would have gone to school this year from here. None of my students.”

These schools serve as examples of how the advisers play different roles depending on the conditions that they face when they arrive. Some find themselves “[taking] the lead,” whereas others are extending the reach of an already active counselor. However, as was evident in School 3, for certain populations of students, the adviser is playing an important role in the college preparation process. This was not only true at School 3, but also at a number of schools in which students expressed that they were not being well-served by the school staff. Some students felt that because they were not in certain college-prep programs such as AVID nobody talked to them about college other than the adviser. For those types of students, the adviser became a lifeline and the main source of their information.

Impact of Adviser on Staff: Reported Structural and Cultural Changes. Across the eight schools in the case study, staff members identified several changes in the college advising process because of the adviser:⁸

- Reduced counselor and teacher workload
- Increased attention toward college advising among counselors
- Greater number of students and college goals completed earlier in the year
- Increased knowledge of college preparation process
- Increased cohesion among various college advising efforts

Across the schools, including the 2011 implementation schools, it was apparent that the adviser served an important function of taking some, or the entire, college advising burden off the guidance counselors. Increasingly, counselors are tasked with multiple responsibilities in addition to college advising, to which they are not able to devote the necessary time working with students one-on-one, helping them fill out forms, or navigating websites. Some of the schools have found that they can transfer the college advising responsibilities almost entirely to the adviser, whereas others have restructured their services so that counselors are still involved but are not the sole source of information. Regardless of the approach, the counselors all spoke positively of the assistance afforded by the advisers' presence.

The Student Experience. Students' experiences with Advise TX were uniformly positive across schools. Even in first year program schools, administrators, counselors, teachers, and the students themselves attested to a tangible impact that the adviser had on both individual students and the school overall. Students and staff reported that the Advise TX advisers provided greater accessibility, attention, detailed information, and one-on-one guidance than was available previously. Students were able to get assistance from advisers any time of day, typically by dropping by their office with questions or with requests for assistance with applications and financial aid forms. Staff reported that having an adviser dedicated to college counseling full-time not only provided students with an easily accessible resource, but also positively impacted the overall college-going culture as well. Personal attributes of advisers, specifically those associated with being a near-peer adviser, were also consistently reported as credits to the positive experience of students.

Case Studies 2014 and 2016

The College Adviser Provides Unique Assistance. An important contribution of the 2014 and 2016 case studies was the ability to provide a comparative view of the college preparation efforts between schools with the Advise TX program and those without such assistance. The research team visited three of each type of school, each of which was comparable in terms of its college-going rates. Although both program and non-program schools predominately measured the success of their college-going cultures based on compliance with a limited number of requirements, the college advisers were still able to provide a unique service to students.

⁸ These findings are only meant to represent the staff members' observations. Not all changes were not reported at every school.

Specifically, the college advisers seemed more successful than traditional staff members at cultivating relationships with students, which allowed them to provide a more personalized form of college advising.

Previous evaluations have found that the near-peer aspect of the college advising program has allowed the advisers to be successful at building trust and close relationships with students. The case studies in Texas appeared to uphold this finding when comparing how students speak about their interactions with the college adviser versus how interactions were spoken about in the non-program schools. That is not to say that students in non-program schools did not speak positively about their college-focused interactions with teachers or counselors, but there seemed to be a more personalized element to the exchanges between the college adviser and students.

The College Adviser “Enhances” College Preparation Efforts. Two of the three program schools, in Austin and San Antonio, had well established college preparation systems in place that involved the collaboration of a team of staff members and external providers. In these schools, the college adviser served more as a cog in a college preparation machine, as opposed to the central hub of all college-related activities. Even so, in this role the advisers were able to enhance the already established college preparation repertoires of the schools by helping the teams accomplish goals that had been put on the back burner because of a lack of resources.

The College Adviser Can Provide Stability to College Preparation. A common challenge faced by the schools partnering with Advise TX is the regularity of leadership and staff turnover. Advisers often find themselves in the position of having to navigate an environment that is constantly changing, both in terms of the personnel advisers rely on for information and access, as well as the messaging around college-going, which is often guided by the school’s leadership. While these challenges can prove to be disruptive in some ways to program operations, the advisers often serve as a sort of beacon that keeps the college-going message and push alive, even when faced with an ever-changing environment. This role was particularly important because five of the six schools visited experienced leadership changes between 2014 and 2016.

Conclusion

Overall, the Texas case studies illustrate that Advise TX plays a role in strengthening the college-going culture of high schools. From creating stronger bonds with students that allow the advisers to be more influential over their college-going behavior to enhancing the work of the counseling staff and their ability to reach more students, the advisers continue to push these schools to have stronger college-going messages. The program continues to receive high praise from both students and staff and is often considered an essential partnership.

VII. Advise TX Advisers

Outside of measuring the impact of the program on various student and school outcomes, including enrollment, persistence, intermediary college admissions milestones, and college-going culture, CAC also measures the impact of the program on the near-peer graduates serving as

college advisers in Advise TX. CAC collects data on the adviser experience and the program's impact on life choices through an annual survey administered by EASE. The 2018 survey represents a 100 percent response rate for advisers serving as part of the Advise TX program in 2017-18. This section highlights the results from this survey.

The Advise TX Adviser Experience

In the adviser survey, advisers provide feedback on their experience as an adviser. This year, 90 percent of Advise TX advisers reported they agreed, or strongly agreed, that they felt like part of a national movement to increase the number of low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented students entering and completing college. Moreover, approximately nine in 10 Advise TX advisers reported feeling either satisfied, or very satisfied, with their overall experience as an adviser, and 82 percent of advisers reported that they would recommend to others serving with Advise TX. When asked why, specifically, advisers might recommend to others serving with Advise TX, one adviser shared:

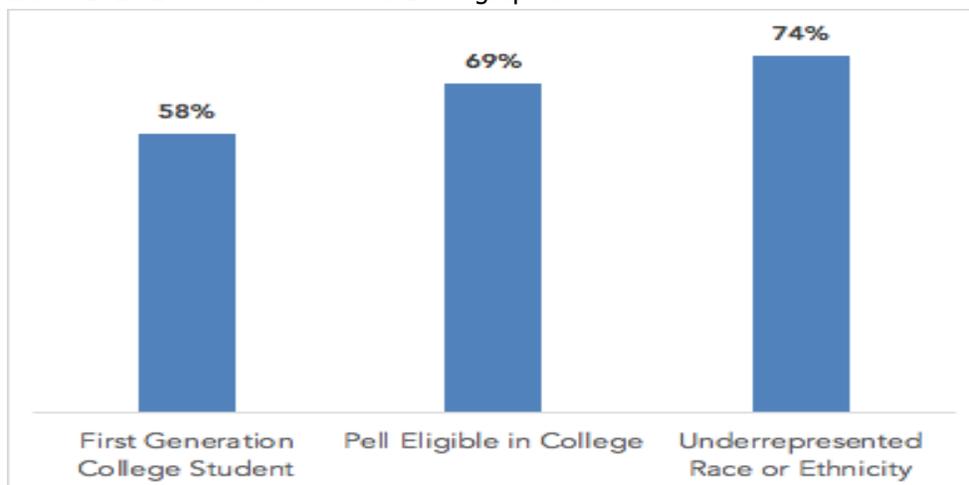
"I really have grown to love my students, they are my motivation. Even though it gets really challenging and hard at times, I know I am making a difference in their lives."

Taken together, these results indicate high levels of adviser-reported satisfaction with their participation in the Advise TX program.

Impact of Advise TX Adviser's Life Choices: Employment and Graduate School

In addition to gathering feedback on the adviser experience, advisers are surveyed as an opportunity to learn more about the program's impact on adviser's life choices. Per self-reported demographic data collected on this survey, Advise TX advisers are largely reflective on populations they serve. For example, 74 percent of advisers identified as an underrepresented race or ethnicity, and 69 percent reported Pell eligibility while in college (Figure 6). Furthermore, 58 percent of Advise TX advisers serving in the 2017-18 year were first generation college students themselves, indicating that almost two-thirds of Advise TX advisers, at least, would also be first-generation students in graduate school.

Figure 6. 2017-18 Advise TX Adviser Demographics



Advisers are asked to rate the likelihood of being employed in select sectors (education, nonprofit, college access or counseling) or attending graduate school *before* and *after* their experience serving as an Advise TX adviser. Data for this question indicated a clear program impact on advisers’ post-Advise TX life choices and are listed in Table 8.

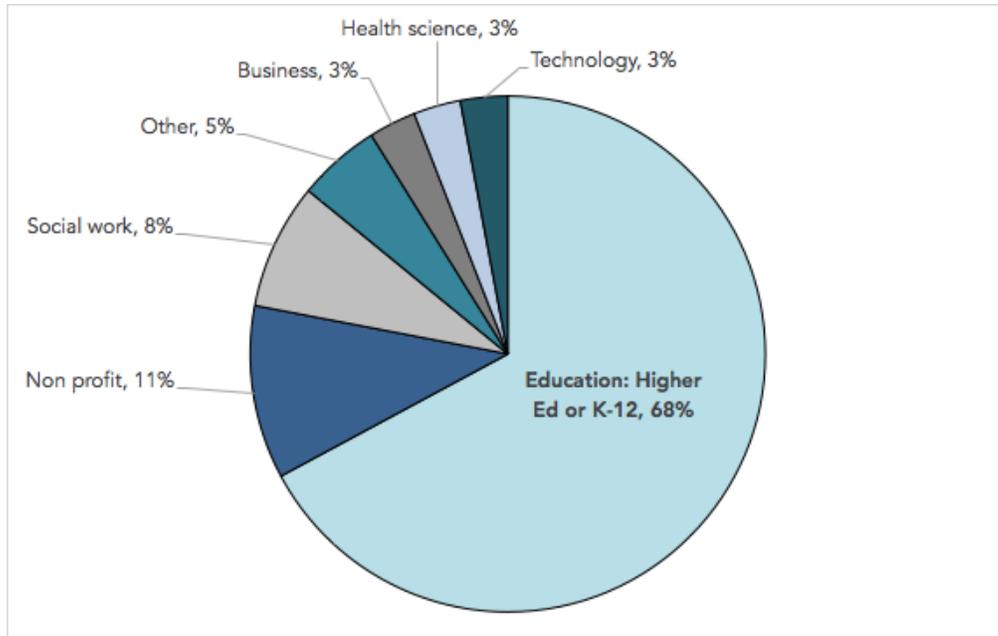
Table 8. Likelihood of Adviser Employment in Select Sectors, Before and After Service with Advise TX

	Percent Likely or Very Likely Before Advise TX	Percent Likely or Very Likely After Advise TX	Difference: Before and After Advise TX
Education sector	37%	66%	+ 29%
Nonprofit sector	47%	64%	+ 17%
College access or college counseling	30%	68%	+ 38%
Attend graduate school	69%	89%	+ 20%

Advisers reported increased likelihood of pursuing employment in all sectors, and attending graduate school, as a result of serving with Advise TX. After their service with Advise TX, a majority of advisers reported they would likely pursue employment in all of the selected sectors, and the vast majority reported they would likely attend graduate school. Importantly, the largest increases in likelihood were located within the education sector and the college access or counseling spaces. Of the employment sectors, specifically, Advise TX advisers reported being least likely to pursue employment in college access or counseling prior to their service, but reported being most likely to pursue employment in this field after service. These data are encouraging in that they not only indicate that advisers’ life choices are being positively influenced by participation in the Advise TX program, but also highlight that the program is increasing advisers’ likelihood of becoming future leaders in the education space.

Outgoing advisers are surveyed to gather data about their post-Advise TX plans. Only two out of 47 outgoing advisers in the 2017-18 year were undecided about their post-Advise TX plans at the conclusion of the academic year. The vast majority (96%) of Advise TX advisers had secured employment or were planning to attend graduate school. Similar to the results previously discussed, a majority of outgoing advisers (68%) pursuing employment indicated they would be working in education the following year – 55 percent in college admissions or higher education and 13 percent in teaching. A total of 11 percent of advisers reported they would be employed at a nonprofit organization (Figure 7, page 29).

Figure 7. Percent of Outgoing Advise TX Advisers Pursuing Employment in Select Sectors



Outgoing advisers pursuing graduate school reported similar outcomes. Of the fields of study represented, education-related fields of study were the most frequently reported.

The quantitative data captured in the adviser survey is complemented with qualitative data regarding the impact of the program on advisers’ post-Advise TX life choices. One adviser noted:

"It's an amazing program and it prepares you to be a good worker in life. The skills you gain are super important for any position, and it also gives you a better knowledge on how to serve your community and work with people in general"

Impact on Advise TX Advisers’ Life Choices: Location of Residence

CAC collects data on an annual adviser survey regarding relocation plans of outgoing advisers. Seventy-seven percent of the outgoing advisers in 2017-18 planned to remain in Texas after concluding their service. Historical data on former advisers, reported by Advise TX program directors, mirror what was found in the adviser survey for the outgoing advisers of 2017-18. For example, the program director for the TCU Advise TX chapter reported that only 18 of the program’s 88 alumni (20%) currently live outside the state of Texas.

VIII. Conclusion

There are a number of key conclusions based on the results:

- Advise TX improved college enrollment for students.
- Advise TX is especially effective among Hispanic and low-income students.
- Advise TX’s primary impact is in encouraging students who would not have attended college to attend two-year colleges.

- Average one-year college persistence rates among Advise TX schools increased by 5 percentage points between the classes of 2012 and 2016.
- Students who meet with an adviser, particularly first-generation and underrepresented minorities, are more likely to apply to college(s), apply to four-year colleges, and be accepted to college.
- Schools report that advisers help to strengthen a high school's college-going culture, particularly by forming strong relationships with students, offering more in-depth guidance throughout the college application process, and enhancing the college preparation efforts of the school.
- Advisers report high levels of satisfaction with their Advise TX experience, and subsequently, are choosing to pursue graduate schools and careers in education.

Overall, during its eight years of school partnerships, Advise TX has produced promising results not only in terms of increasing the number of students who attend and persist in college, but also in terms of improving the high school environments of Texas students and the life choices of the participating advisers. The program has been well received by the participating high schools and is considered a key component to college preparation efforts. While this multi-year evaluation effort has helped to shed light on how the program is impacting students, schools, and advisers, future evaluations will continue to explore program effectiveness as Advise TX expands to more high schools.

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Appendix I

RCT Research Design and Data Sources

The primary design for the impact research is based on a randomized experiment across schools. Within regional blocks, schools were randomly selected to participate in the treatment. Such a design is among the strongest research designs in achieving internal validity in estimating the impacts of the programs. There are some limitations. First, the unit of analysis becomes the school, and the resulting study has less statistical power than an alternative design might have. Second, attrition of schools from Advise TX limits the statistical power by reducing compliance.

In terms of external validity, sampling procedures did not allow EASE to choose the most disadvantaged schools in Texas, and while the schools in the study have challenges, they are not the schools with the lowest college-going rates. As such, the results should be viewed as shedding light on the impact of the program in disadvantaged schools but not the most disadvantaged schools.

Primary data comes from the THECB and the NSC. As a result, there is minimal attrition at the student level. EASE measures college enrollment in the fall immediately following students' high school graduations. The data can only be accessed on secure servers at the THECB. The THECB data were available with a nine-month lag. The NSC data were available starting May 2017.

The primary outcome, college enrollment, is measured as a binary indicator, and results indicate the impact of the program on the probability that students enroll. Given the randomization, simple comparisons of control and treatment groups are used; however, this simple comparison is augmented with controls for the regional blocks used in the randomization process.

As mentioned, EASE and CAC collaborated with the THECB to identify and randomly select high schools to receive the program. There were 111 schools that were eligible for random assignment to the program and constitute the experimental sample. To ensure geographic diversity, the 111 schools were divided into 23 geographic regions, and a lottery was held within each region to select treatment schools. Thirty-six schools were randomly chosen for treatment assignment out of the set of 111 across the regions. Three of the schools were admitted through a waiting list, which was formed from a randomized list of control schools across all regions.

Table 1 (page 33) presents descriptive statistics at both the school and student levels for demographic variables and a variety of college related outcome variables measured in the year prior to treatment. The first column of numbers contains means for all Texas high schools followed by schools in the experimental sample, as well as treatment schools. Given the selection criteria and goals of the Advise TX program, schools in the experiment have a higher share of minority and low-income students, but graduation rates are quite similar.

Table 1 also investigates balance in pretreatment covariates and pretreatment outcomes across treatment and control schools taken from data in the pretreatment year (2010-11). There do

appear to be differences in the racial makeup of the schools assigned to treatment, with treatment schools more likely to have higher percentages of black students and lower percentages of Hispanic students. During the randomization, Advise TX used only the aggregate percentage of underrepresented minorities (“URM” in Table 1), and the treatment and control samples are balanced on this variable. The randomization within blocks yielded some differences in black and Hispanic representation. The other covariates in Table 1 and the joint test on significance of all differences fail to reject equality of the sample across treatment and control groups, suggesting randomization produced relatively equivalent treatment and control groups.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Experimental Balance

Panel A: School Level										
Variable	All TX High Schools		All Experiment High Schools		All Treatment High Schools		Raw Difference T-C		T-C Difference with Lottery Controls	
	Mean	Stdev.	Mean	Stdev.	Mean	Stdev.	Difference	Std. Error	Difference	Std. Error
White	0.427	0.297	0.225	0.227	0.214	0.223	-0.017	0.046	-0.018	0.031
AA/Black	0.115	0.164	0.171	0.171	0.217	0.208	0.068	0.034	0.076	0.028
Hispanic	0.419	0.296	0.568	0.273	0.526	0.276	-0.062	0.055	-0.070	0.036
Other	0.038	0.058	0.036	0.035	0.043	0.043	0.010	0.007	0.011	0.006
URM	0.535	0.304	0.738	0.233	0.743	0.229	0.006	0.047	0.006	0.032
Low-income	0.549	0.233	0.635	0.179	0.636	0.169	0.001	0.036	0.009	0.030
Grad Rate	0.806	0.240	0.833	0.085	0.846	0.071	0.021	0.023	0.039	0.025
Total Students	748	879	1683	838	1848	956	242.9	169.1	192.9	143.0
College Ready	0.424	0.218	0.424	0.105	0.427	0.097	0.004	0.021	0.001	0.019
Took ACT/SAT	0.509	0.300	0.616	0.150	0.585	0.122	-0.046	0.030	-0.046	0.031
N	1785		111		36		Chisq(6)=6.52, p=.37		Chisq(6)=9.91, p=.13	
Panel B: Student Level										
Variable	All TX High Schools		All Experimental High Schools		All Treatment High Schools		Raw Difference T-C		T-C Difference with Lottery Controls	
	Mean	Stdev.	Mean	Stdev.	Mean	Stdev.	Difference	Std. Error	Difference	Std. Error
White	0.375	0.484	0.221	0.408	0.189	0.392	-0.049	0.034	-0.031	0.023
AA/Black	0.135	0.342	0.178	0.383	0.220	0.414	0.049	0.036	0.084**	0.023
Hispanic	0.433	0.495	0.564	0.496	0.537	0.499	-0.005	0.056	-0.067**	0.025
Other race	0.057	0.232	0.046	0.209	0.054	0.226	0.006	0.012	0.014	0.007
URM	0.567	0.495	0.743	0.437	0.757	0.429	0.044	0.039	0.017	0.022
Female	0.499	0.500	0.505	0.500	0.507	0.500	0.004	0.006	0.004	0.005
FRL	0.381	0.486	0.476	0.499	0.495	0.500	0.035	0.045	0.008	0.029
Age	17.182	0.590	17.198	0.593	17.177	0.584	-0.022	0.016	-0.024	0.013
N / Joint Test	280089		38370		14052		Chisq(5) =5.20, p=.39		Chisq(5) =8.53, p=.13	

Notes: This table uses school level data from the 2010-11 school year, the year prior to treatment implementation. P-values of difference between treatment and control use clustered standard errors at the school level (111 schools). Treatment assignment in the first year of the treatment is used as measure of treatment. The joint test includes “URM” instead of black/Hispanic since original selection was conditional on URM.

Student level outcome data is provided by THECB for the first three years of the treatment (2011-12, 2012-13, and 2013-14 school years). THECB assembled the data by matching higher education enrollment records from the universities and colleges to the TEA data on high school enrollment. THECB deidentified the data and kept it at the student level. Data were stored at the THECB and could only be accessed on a secure server located at THECB in Austin, Texas. The NSC data were matched to these data by THECB. The key variables were students' college enrollment in the fall after graduation, including the type of institution, students' age, gender, and race, and basic socioeconomic data (i.e., free or reduced-price lunch participation). No changes were made in the research design from the initial SEP. Results are estimated at the student level, despite the school-level nature of the intervention creating a clustered RCT. Because of the randomized nature of the study, a simple regression model is used to identify the causal effects of having the Advise TX program in a high school on individual college enrollment outcomes.

$$(1) \quad y_{ij} = \alpha_j + X_{ij} \beta + \delta * \text{Treatment}_{ij} + \epsilon_{ij}$$

Student i in region j receives a value of one for the binary treatment variable if the student was enrolled in a high school assigned to treatment. Because EASE blocked on region, they include region fixed effects, α_j . They also include available demographic information such as gender, race, and low-income status as covariates to increase precision. They estimate binary outcomes using linear probability models for ease of interpretation. It is debatable whether clustering standard errors by school or by school-by-year level is preferable. EASE chose a more conservative approach of using standard errors, which cluster at the school level since consecutive cohorts of graduating students may be related within schools. The Texas administrative data from the THECB track all students who graduate from Texas public high schools into all public institutions of higher education within Texas. The THECB data is augmented with NSC data to track enrollments out-of-state and into private postsecondary institutions.

The above analysis provides intent to treat estimates; however, compliance with treatment assignment in the first year is approximately 75 percent (Table 2, page 35). Five schools of the 36 assigned to treatment subsequently declined to accept an adviser. Advise TX requires data sharing, dedicated space, and administrative oversight. Many schools who initially applied were unable or unwilling to comply with these requirements. Additionally, nine control schools received an adviser, in part, to make up for the five treatment schools that declined to participate and, in part, due to an increase in the number of advisers available. Although EASE had randomly constructed a waitlist with the schools assigned control status, program staff violated the waitlist in three instances thereby undermining this level of randomization.⁹

⁹ Advise TX uses a hybrid of public monies and private philanthropy. Some of the violations came as donors attached conditions to their gifts. For example, after seeing Advise TX operate in some Fort Worth schools, a local donor offered complete funding for the program so long as Advise TX would expand into all schools, including control schools, in the area.

EASE focuses on intent to treat estimates throughout the analysis, although simple Wald estimators can be used to estimate the treatment on the treated effect, inflating the intent to treat effects by approximately 33 percent.

Table 2. Treatment Compliance in Year 1 (2011-12)

Panel A: School Level			
	Treatment Received	Control Received	Total
Treatment Assigned	31	5	36
Control Assigned	9	66	75
Total	40	72	111
Lottery controlled regression of treatment received on treatment assignment		0.745 (0.072)	
Panel B: Student Level			
	Treatment Received	Control Received	Total
Treatment Assigned	12529	1324	13853
Control Assigned	3267	21004	24271
Total	15796	22328	38124
Lottery controlled regression of treatment received on treatment assignment		0.774 (0.070)	

Note: For year 2011-12, first year of treatment. Standard error clustered at the school level in the student-level regression.

Appendix II

School Case Studies (full description, including some material presented in the main report)

Case studies conducted at both partner and non-partner high schools have been another ongoing component of the EASE evaluation of Advise TX effectiveness. This portion of the evaluation has provided detailed insight and meaning to the quantitative measures of the college-going culture such as the proportion of students taking college preparation courses (measured with Texas K-12 course data), average level of student postsecondary aspirations, stakeholder engagement in and coordination of college-prep activities such as college and financial aid informational workshops, college tours, taking entrance exams, and talking with college reps (measured with annual Advise TX student survey data). Qualitative case study data supplements the quantitative data by providing a more in-depth perspective of the interaction between Advise TX advisers, school staff, students, and parents; the values and priorities of various stakeholders (staff, students, families); and the extent to which collaboration and coordination of college-prep activities allow greater reach of the college-going culture of the school across grade levels and achievement. It is this experiential aspect of the program that is important to understand if it is to have an impact on college-going culture. Specifically, in what way is the program disrupting, complementing, or enhancing the college behavior, activities, and attitudes of the different stakeholders that it touches/serves?

Since Advise TX started in the state, EASE has conducted several rounds of case studies, both prior to and during the RCT (2010-11, 2014, and 2016). Prior to the RCT, the case studies focused more exclusively on providing an in-depth description of program operations and functioning within schools. The case studies conducted during the RCT explored the program's impact on college-going culture through a comparison with program and non-program schools. For the first time, the research team was able to conduct case studies at schools without an Advise TX adviser, which provided a unique opportunity to understand different approaches toward college preparation. Specifically, they were able to identify the unique contributions that a college adviser brings to a school beyond providing college counseling. This section of the report provides an overview of the key takeaways from the site visits in terms of Advise TX's impact on a high school's college-going culture.

Data Sources

For all of the case studies, data collection consisted of daylong site visits at selected high schools. Each site visit targeted six types of informants: administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, parents, students, and the Advise TX adviser, in the case of the program schools. In 2010 and 2011 EASE visited eight Advise TX schools selected to maximize geographic variation, and in 2014 they visited three Advise TX schools and three non-program schools in the Houston, Central Texas, and San Antonio regions, which were revisited in 2016. For the 2010 and 2011 visits, four schools were selected where the program had been in place for at least one year, and four schools where the program was just beginning, to assess college-going culture prior to the Advise TX

partnership. For the later visits during the RCT, visits focused on schools with mid-level college-going rates, which served as a proxy for the strength of a school's college-going culture. The average college-going rate for the Texas schools (both non-program and program) involved in the RCT as a whole in 2011 was 52 percent. EASE used this number to calculate a mid-level range of college-going across the schools (47-57%), eliminating from the sample schools with little room to grow in terms of their college outreach and activities, and also particularly unstable schools hindered by turnover and additional organizational challenges.

Program and Adviser Impact on College-Going Culture

Case Studies 2010 and 2011

Centrality of Adviser. Despite the program having been implemented for a year at four of the schools and several weeks at the rest, many staff members indicated that the advisers played a central role in terms of college advising and that the advisers were providing a different type of service at the school. For example, at School 1 the counselors characterized the adviser as the "glue" that held all of the college advising efforts together within the school. This particular school had had multiple programs, such as GEAR UP, Project Stay, and Communities in Schools for several years, but the counselors described the adviser as the "missing" piece that brought these disparate efforts together. Similarly, the principal said she worked "very closely" with the adviser and considered the adviser to have made a real impact on the school in a way these other programs had not.

Even at one of the schools where the program had only been operating for several weeks, school staff members spoke similarly about the central role that the adviser is playing already. At School 8, the adviser described the situation as somewhat different from the other schools visited in the state because there had never been other college advising programs within the school. In that sense, the mere idea of having an extra resource to devote to college preparation was very exciting for some of the staff members. One teacher commented:

"As a teacher when we were going through staff development the first week I had never been so excited about anything in my life as to find out that there was a person that had that much energy and that much knowledge . . . [the adviser] made such an impression upon us."

Similarly, the counselors mentioned that they were sending any senior who signed up for an appointment regarding college directly to the adviser. They seemed very impressed with the job that the adviser was already doing, even going as far as saying that they had "hit the jackpot." Prior to the adviser coming to the school, the counselors handled all of the college advising responsibilities. The fact that they handed over that role to the adviser so quickly indicates a high level of trust in the adviser and demonstrates his centrality within the school. Moreover, the adviser already had been able to push the college advising to new heights in his first couple of months. For example, the counselors mentioned:

"I was shocked, I guess it was the week after the SAT, the last SAT, he was going around to the classrooms to every kid that took the SAT and saying, 'Did you put the schools down that

you wanted your scores sent to?’ He found out only 20 percent of them did. That’s something we would have never had time to do. Never.”

Schools 1 and 8 are examples of sites where the adviser played a more central role in the college advising process, but at other sites, the adviser was not in a central role. Specifically, in several of the schools, the adviser’s role was more of an extension of the current practices already undertaken by the staff. The adviser served as an additional, albeit important, resource to the already existing college advising efforts. For example, in School 2, we also observed a very active Go Center, but unlike at School 1, the counselors explained that this was not a new experience. One counselor commented:

“What you see [in the Go Center] is what it’s been. I mean, it’s always been functioning at that capacity, that level. [The adviser] was just an additional hand that really helped the kids, because numbers are power. So, if you can reach more kids at that moment, more power to you and them.”

In that sense, the adviser was less like the glue holding the various college efforts together, and more a new type of resource that allowed the staff to reach additional students. A similar situation was found at School 3, where there was already an active college advising team at the school prior to the Advise TX adviser’s arrival. One of the counselors at that school explained that he had to really work with the adviser early on to explain the school’s process of dealing with its particular demographic of students. He mentioned:

“We’re not here to talk about going to college philosophy . . . Our kids need to be told what to do as opposed to this is the process of doing it. We just flat out tell em, ‘Alright, this is your class rank, this is your SAT scores, you need to apply here, here and here and see who gives you the most money.’”

The adviser faced a situation where the school already had a very strategic and systematic approach toward college advising. Most of the staff with whom we spoke concurred that the counseling office was the main body directing the college advising efforts; however, when we spoke with one of the teachers, he told a very different story. He felt that the counselors did not provide any assistance to students who were not in AP classes or highly ranked academically. Instead, he praised the adviser for giving those students the guidance that they were sorely lacking. He was constantly sending students down to the adviser throughout the school year. He remarked:

“I had a student that was ready to not go to college because they couldn’t figure out the website at [Houston Community College] . . . You know, ‘I can’t figure out my FAFSA. I can’t set up my password, so I’ll just not go to college.’ I mean, very, to me, startling and if that office or [the adviser] wasn’t there, I’m deadly serious, I don’t know who would have gone to school this year from here. None of my students.”

These schools serve as examples of how the advisers play different roles depending on the conditions that they face when they arrive. Some find themselves “[taking] the lead,” whereas others are riding the “coattails” of an already active counselor. However, as was evident in

School 3, for certain populations of students, the adviser is playing an important role in the college preparation process. This was not only true at School 3, but also at a number of schools in which students expressed that they were not being well-served by the school staff. Some students felt that because they were not in certain college-prep programs like AVID nobody talked to them about college other than the adviser. For those types of students, the adviser became a lifeline and the main source of their information.

Impact of Adviser on Staff: Reported Structural and Cultural Changes. Across the eight schools in the case study, staff members identified several changes in the college advising process because of the adviser (please keep in mind that these findings are only meant to represent the staff members' observations and that all changes were not reported at every school). These findings are discussed in more detail below.

- Reduced counselor and teacher workload
- Increased attention towards college advising among counselors
- Greater number of students and college goals completed earlier in the year
- Increased knowledge of college preparation process
- Increased cohesion among various college advising efforts

Across the schools, including the 2011 implementation schools, it was apparent that the adviser served an important function of taking some, or the entire, college advising burden off the guidance counselors. Increasingly, counselors are tasked with multiple responsibilities in addition to college advising, to which they are not able to devote the necessary time working with students one-on-one, helping them fill out forms, or navigating websites. Some of the schools have found that they can transfer the college advising responsibilities almost entirely to the adviser, whereas others have restructured their services so that counselors are still involved but are not the sole source of information. Regardless of the approach, the counselors all spoke positively of the assistance afforded by the advisers' presence.

At School 4, a counselor remarked:

"I mean, [the program] makes our job easier, definitely. Like we mentioned before, you know there's a lot of things going on and not every day is about getting seniors into college, you know what I mean? We have so many different students here, different issues, and [the adviser] makes our job – my job a lot easier, definitely."

Additionally, to the advisers serving as a resource, in some schools they seemed to improve how counselors approached college advising in general. At School 1 a teacher remarked that the counselors "are extremely involved this year" and that she felt like the adviser has "kept them on their toes." This increased involvement among the counselors was also a reported impact from earlier site visits in other states. Perhaps part of this increase is due to the added knowledge and expertise that the advisers bring to the school. Both teachers and counselors at several schools commented on how they would often seek information from the adviser, such as specific application requirements. Also, one counselor commented that the adviser was very good at

making sure that students did not slip through the cracks. He gave the example of a student with a high GPA who had not applied to college but had somehow been missed in the regular one-on-one meetings with counselors. The adviser alerted the counselor to the oversight. In certain schools, this additional assistance allowed the counseling staff to reach more students faster during the crucial fall months when most college applications are due. At School 2, for example, the adviser commented that by mid-October all of the seniors had already applied to the two local colleges, a goal that had not been achieved in years past.

The Student Experience. Students' experiences with Advise TX were uniformly positive across schools. Even in first year program schools, administrators, counselors, teachers, and the students themselves attested to a tangible impact that the adviser had on both individual students and the school overall. Students and staff reported that the Advise TX advisers provide greater accessibility, attention, detailed information, and one-on-one guidance than was available previously. Students were able to get assistance from advisers any time of day, typically by dropping by their office with questions or with requests for assistance with applications and financial aid forms. Staff reported that having an adviser dedicated to college counseling full-time not only provided students with an easily accessible resource, but also positively impacted the overall college-going culture as well. Personal attributes of advisers, specifically those associated with being a near-peer adviser, were also consistently reported as credits to the positive experience of students.

Adviser accessibility, presence, and the impact on the culture of the school. In Texas, the combination of the physical presence of the Go Center and the availability of the Advise TX adviser provided easy access to help and information. This student from School 4 referred to this accessibility as she explained her impression of her school's support for college-going:

"I think the Go Center – [the adviser] - I think they do a really good job. I don't know, it's open all the time, so any time that I have a free class, "Oh, can I go to the Go Center?" And like, he's always here to ask me - I come in, and he's like, "What do you need to do today? Do you have anything that you want me to help you with? Any essays or homework?" Anything that - I think he does a really good job."

The continuous presence of a college adviser and the advising activity that surrounded her was often identified as a source of an overall change in the college-going culture of a school. Counselors reported more frequent college talk around the school, an increase in the number of college applications and scholarships, greater numbers of students making college visits, greater attendance to college nights and workshops, and simply, greater awareness of the entire college preparation, choice, and application process. Staff also observed changes in the physical environment – more college pennants and posters hung throughout the school instead of being limited to the Go Center and greater participation among staff and students on college t-shirt days.

There was some variation in the way that students, advisers, and staff described the degree of change in the college-going culture, but all discussed change in a positive direction. Many staff

described an existing emphasis on college-going strengthened further with the presence of the Advise TX program. In referring to her school's culture, for example, an administrator at School 4 described the adviser as "another piece of that whole pie," because he fosters great awareness among students by simply being "out there, in the hallways, talking to the kids in the classrooms, telling them this is what's coming up." She added quickly, however, "and not that we weren't doing it, but not to that extent."

Benefits of the near-peer model. The benefit of having near-peer advisers was also uniformly identified across all schools. Staff and students both spoke to the "different" relationship advisers have with students because they are more similar to them in age, background, and culture, compared to most teachers and counseling staff. One counselor from School 2 described the effect of near-peer characteristics as "powerful" in terms of the ease in which the adviser can relate to students, and how that in turn has translated into students constantly seeking him out for guidance and information. In other words, there is a certain level of credibility that the near-peer adviser holds over the older counselors in the school. For instance, a counselor in School 5 acknowledged that students in her school will ask questions of the adviser that they would not ask the other counselors because the adviser is "in the same generation." An administrator from School 4 summed it up this way:

"But to have someone who they feel they can go to and talk to on their level about what's going on, what is college really about. To them, we're just talking because that's our job. But when he's talking about it, it's more like oh, I think he knows what he's talking about. He's been through this. So, it does help to have a younger person that's closer to their age talking about things that are important to them. He's made it through to graduate, so he can talk up many avenues that would make them more interested in going. I think he's done that quite a bit."

Being not only an age-peer but also from the local community with a similar background appears to enhance potential role-modeling effects as well. Other adviser attributes beyond near-peer characteristics were identified by various staff, students, and parents. Positivity, an outgoing personality, youthfulness, and being energetic and dedicated were common attributes identified as contributing to positive student experiences with advisers.

Student Appraisals. Students were generally very appreciative of the work of the advisers on their behalf and excited for their postsecondary futures. They too recognized the benefits of near-peer adviser characteristics, and their primary concern is the continuance of the program at their school. While some students began thinking about college prior to high school, many did not start until their freshman year. Almost all the students interviewed were focused on attending college upon graduation. Finally, students recognize uneven support and assistance for college advising, particularly with regard to the presence of special programs such as AVID, International Baccalaureate (IB), magnets, and academies.

Congruent with the observations of staff and teachers, students describe advisers as friendly, accessible, and most of all helpful. This conversation from a student focus group in School 4 is representative:

- Interviewer:** *How do you guys feel about [the adviser] specifically? Is there anything about him that makes it nice to have him here at the school, or?*
- Student 6:** *He's really friendly.*
- Student 5:** *Yes.*
- Student 3:** *Oh yeah.*
- Student 6:** *Like, he jokes around with us, and he's pretty cool.*
- Interviewer:** *What about the rest of you guys? How do you feel about him specifically?*
- Student 1:** *I think he can relate to us really well. You feel more comfortable being around someone you can relate to.*
- Interviewer:** *In what ways can he relate to you?*
- Student 2:** *Just like, I guess you could say lifestyle wise, or [how he] grew up. He knows how it is to grow up in our type of neighborhood, or our side of town.*
- Student 1:** *That, or like, I guess explain your situation at home and stuff, and he'll understand like that. It's like, you go to a counselor, of course she's gonna listen, but there are some counselors that will listen to you, but just judge you. They don't mean to, but-*
- Student 3:** *He won't judge us. He's always there for us when we need him.*

Students across all schools also mentioned adviser accessibility as an important aspect of the program, as well as the one-on-one attention they receive on everything from answering a simple question of information to being personally taken to college fairs and visits. As one student told us about her adviser, "He has a lot more time than the counselors, or I guess he's always here, not like the counselors. The counselors have other things to do, too."

Students made similar observations about the disparity in college advising experiences particularly among the high ability and lower ability students. Most students attend schools in which there are multiple college assistance programs running, and this appears to allow for variation in student experiences of college preparation support. For example, in some schools there is a strong AVID program, in others there is long-standing GEAR UP presence, and in still others there are academies, magnet, IB, and other programs within the school that are strongly oriented to college preparation and attendance. The student experience of Advise TX under these conditions varied by the location of the student in this broader multi-program school environment prior to the beginning of the program. For those students who were actively served by an existing program, their experience of Advise TX was that of added support, coordination, and especially, accessibility. These students were usually among the higher achievers in the school. High-ability students and those in AVID, magnet programs, and academies benefitted from access to multiple sources of assistance, advice, and information. Teachers in those programs and in upper-level

classes constantly referred to college as the next step for their students; discussed college expectations, preferences, and academics; and often used class time for college specific activities such as working on application essays.

These students still mentioned the near-peer characteristics of the adviser and generally stronger relationships with the program adviser, even when staff in other groups (like AVID, for example) were relatively young. Students who were not previously served reported a greater difference in attention, assistance, and the college-going culture of the school since the beginning of Advise TX.

Case Studies 2014 and 2016

The College Adviser Provides Unique Assistance. An important contribution of the 2014 and 2016 case studies was the ability to provide a comparative view of the college preparation efforts between schools with the Advise TX program and those without such assistance. The research team visited three of each type of school, each of which was comparable in terms of its college-going rates. Although both program and non-program schools predominately measured the success of their college-going cultures based on compliance with a limited number of requirements, the college advisers were still able to provide a unique service to students. Specifically, the college advisers seemed more successful than traditional staff members at cultivating relationships with students, which allowed them to provide a more personalized form of college advising.

Previous evaluations have found that the near-peer aspect of the college advising program has allowed the advisers to be successful at building trust and close relationships with students. The case studies in Texas appeared to uphold this finding when comparing how students speak about their interactions with the college adviser versus how interactions were spoken about in the non-program schools. That is not to say that students in non-program schools did not speak positively about their college-focused interactions with teachers or counselors, but there seemed to be a more personalized element to the exchanges between the college adviser and students.

Similar to students, staff members at schools also recognized the deeper relationships that the advisers were able to build with students. A counselor at a program school in San Antonio commented:

"All the Advise TX [advisers] – we have [had] three of them – they're – I can't emphasize enough how powerful they have been on campus and even just to – even for the short time working with the students, the students – they really connect with the students. And last year I kind of noticed in a way – and that was when I started to feel kind of old – but they connect kind of on a different level. They're connecting better with her than with me, and not necessarily like that's a bad thing, but that's why she's here."

The College Adviser Enhances College Preparation Efforts. Two of the three program schools, in Austin and San Antonio, had well established college preparation systems in place that involved the collaboration of a team of staff members and external providers. In these schools, the college adviser served more as a cog in a college preparation machine, as opposed to the central hub of all college-related activities. Even so, in this role the advisers were able to enhance the already established college preparation repertoires of the schools by helping the teams accomplish goals that had been put on the back burner because of a lack of resources. For example, the counselor at the program school in Austin remarked how helpful it is to have the support of the Advise TX program:

"I just love the support. And I love the fact that like seriously, you guys (the Advise TX program) have just such deliverable, intentional priority objectives that you have to meet and target, which aligns to exactly what we're doing. And so it makes so much sense to have a person 40 hours a week, that they take on that role. And the kids, by her being so young, Connor being young, or Claire, they identify with that younger group of – what do you call it, social media kids? And they just love [the college adviser]."

While the non-program schools often organized their college preparation activities in a similar manner, that is they had a dedicated college team, they did not have the added assistance that would allow them to develop new avenues for outreach as was possible through the partnerships with Advise TX.

The College Adviser Can Provide Stability to College Preparation. A common challenge faced by the schools partnering with Advise TX is the regularity of leadership and staff turnover. Advisers often find themselves in the position of having to navigate an environment that is constantly changing, both in terms of the personnel advisers rely on for information and access, as well as the messaging around college-going, which is often guided by the school's leadership. While these challenges can prove to be disruptive in some ways to program operations, the advisers often serve as a sort of beacon that keeps the college-going message and push alive, even when faced with an ever-changing environment. This role was particularly important because five of the six schools visited experienced leadership changes between 2014 and 2016.

For example, the adviser at the program school in Houston had experienced working with two different principals during her tenure. The principal during her first year took a more hands-on approach to improving the college-going culture. The principal pushed for college visuals to be displayed throughout the school, creating an area known as "College Boulevard." She also started an initiative with an honors college at Texas Southern University to recruit more of the higher achieving students from the high school. Additionally, the school supplemented the adviser's program budget so that more college trips could be organized for students. In that sense, there was a college-going push coming from the school leadership and not strictly from the Advise TX program. The adviser felt that this had changed during the 2013-14 academic year, as the new school principal seemed less inclined to continue these efforts. Despite this change, the adviser continued to have an impact on students' behaviors and attitudes towards college-going. With regard to behavior, the adviser noted that since she had been in the school she had seen an eight

percent increase in students who had applied and been accepted to two and four-year universities. She even expected to see a 10 percent increase for the 2013-14 academic year. Additionally, the adviser felt that she had played a large role in the increase in scholarship awards students were receiving because of the one-on-one assistance she was able to provide.

The program school in San Antonio had also experienced some personnel changes between the time of our two visits as they had received a GEAR UP grant and were able to add college-focused counselors dedicated to each grade level. When the former senior counselor was given the opportunity to become the GEAR UP coordinator she hesitated to take the job and entrust the college advising responsibilities to a new person. However, she explained:

"Part of the reason I took the [job] – when I was offered the position, it was in June and before I said yes, I was like, "Okay, well [the college adviser] will still be in the GO Center, so it will be okay." I knew that the Advise TX member – I knew specifically that she would be there, and she's amazing, but also all the Advise TX [advisers] – we have [had] three of them – they're – I can't emphasize enough how powerful they have been on campus."

It is important to note that the Advise TX adviser in this school was viewed with such high regard that this staff member felt comfortable enough leaving her position knowing that the adviser would be able to continue working with the students and assist the new staff member coming into that senior counselor position. The adviser was in a position to carry on the college preparation work that this former counselor had worked so hard to establish.

Conclusion

Overall, the Texas case studies illustrate that Advise TX plays a role in strengthening the college-going culture of high schools. From creating stronger bonds with students that allow the advisers to be more influential over their college-going behavior, to enhancing the work of the counseling staff and their ability to reach more students, the advisers continue to push these schools to have stronger college-going messages. The program continues to receive high praise from both students and staff and is often considered an essential partnership.