

College Readiness and Success



A Report on the Effectiveness of Advise TX

**General Appropriations Act,
House Bill 1, Article III, Section 51
86th Texas Legislature**

October 2020

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The THECB will be recognized as an international leader in developing and implementing innovative higher education policy to accomplish our mission.

Agency Philosophy

The THECB will promote access to and success in quality higher education across the state with the conviction that access and success without quality is mediocrity and that quality without access and success is unacceptable.

The THECB's core values are:

Accountability: We hold ourselves responsible for our actions and welcome every opportunity to educate stakeholders about our policies, decisions, and aspirations.

Efficiency: We accomplish our work using resources in the most effective manner.

Collaboration: We develop partnerships that result in student success and a highly qualified, globally competent workforce.

Excellence: We strive for excellence in all our endeavors.

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Executive Summary

Advise TX works in partnership with colleges and universities across the state, drawing on their infrastructure and resources, to increase the number of low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented Texas students entering and completing postsecondary education. In 2019-20, four university chapters—Texas A&M University, The University of Texas at Austin, Texas Christian University, and Trinity University—together served 115 high schools in Texas.

Advise TX differs from other college access models in that Advise TX serves the whole school, rather than a limited cohort of students, to foster a school-wide, college-going culture. Advise TX accomplishes this mission by placing exceptional recent college graduates from all fields of study on high school campuses as near-peer college advisers. Advise TX advisers receive intensive training before serving in a high school, completing a six-week practical curriculum that focuses on college access, college admissions, financial aid, student services, diversity, community service, and professionalism. Advisers focus on best-fit colleges, encouraging students to attend schools that will serve them well both academically and socially.

Importantly, Advise TX participates in external evaluation to quantitatively measure the relationship between advising and college enrollment. The purpose of this report is to summarize recent analysis of the completion of key college application activities by low-income students of color supported by Advise TX advisers, as well as outline improvements in college matriculation for these focal students.

Recently published Advise TX results from a randomized control trial study conducted between 2011-12 and 2013-14 found that low-income and Hispanic students who met with an Advise TX adviser saw statistically significant college enrollment increases of 2 to 3 percentage points in the fall after high school graduation.¹ Our annual report on college enrollment outcomes for the graduating class of 2017 found similar impacts. Overall, college enrollment rates for the 2018 graduating class² improved by 0.6 percentage points for the low-income population when served by Advise TX. Further, African American students saw a 1.9 percentage point increase in four-year college attendance when served by Advise TX, and Hispanic students saw a 1.1 percentage point increase in two-year college attendance.

¹ Bettinger, Eric & Brent J. Evans. "[College guidance for all: A randomized experiment in pre-college advising.](#)" *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 38, no. 3 (March 2019): 579-599.

² This is the most recent graduating class for which full first-year enrollment data are available, given lags on enrollment data availability.

Introduction

Advise TX is a partner program of the national 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 advisers work 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 enroll in college or university.

Participating high schools are selected based on specific criteria that identify high schools most in need of additional support. These criteria include more than 35% of the campus on the free and reduced lunch program, a direct-to-college going rate of less than 70%, fewer than 55% of students in a rigorous curriculum program, and a graduating class of more than 100 students.

CAC worked with Dr. Eric Bettinger, Professor of Education at Stanford University and a partner with Evaluation and Assessment Solutions for Education (EASE), to prepare a report on the impact of the Advise TX program on college-going rates, based on a randomized, controlled trial study conducted 2012-16. The report provided an overview of Advise TX outcomes, specifically application and FAFSA completion rates and Advise TX matched-group data analysis of college enrollment, including overall college enrollment, impact on low-income students, and impacts by race. The study showed 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 increased enrollment rates overall, but in large schools, the increase in the number of college attendees represented smaller percentage changes compared with the percentage changes at smaller schools.

Most recent analysis of college enrollment outcomes for the graduating class of 2018 revealed a similar impact. Overall, college enrollment rates improved by 0.6 percentage points for the low-income population when served by Advise TX. Most of this came from a 1 percentage point increase in two-year college attendance. The program also continues to support African American and Hispanic students, with statistically significant increases in four-year and two-year college attendance, respectively. African American students saw a 1.9 percentage point increase in four-year college attendance, and Hispanic students saw a 1.1 percentage point increase in two-year college attendance.

Additionally, in 2019 advisers helped students secure approximately \$154 million in financial aid. This financial aid figure includes institutional and scholarship aid, and likely underestimates the true impact in that it does not include student loans or other federal need-based aid programs. Considering the annual direct costs for 110 advisers at \$59,000 per adviser, this provides a return on investment of \$24 in financial aid for students for every \$1 spent on advisers.

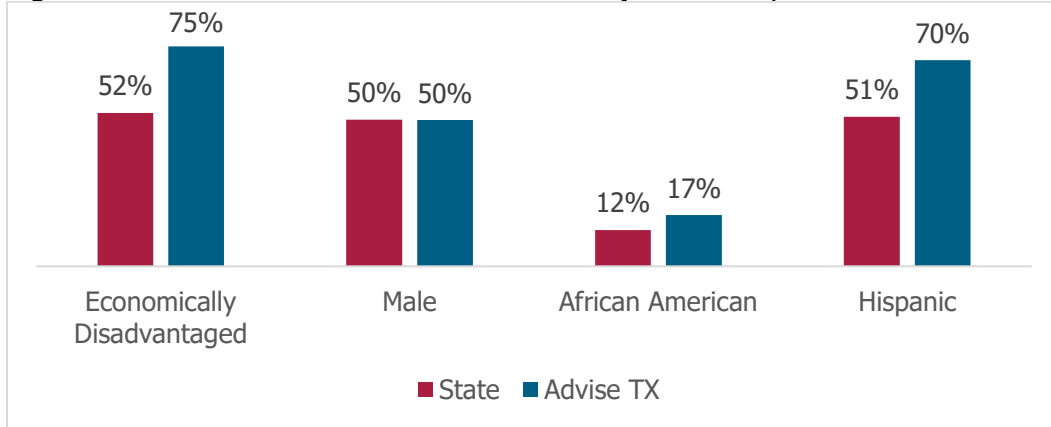
In 2020-21, Advise TX advisers will continue to be an important support for students as they transition into higher education. In the 2019-20 school year, in collaboration with the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), Advise TX advisers and program staff launched initial

efforts to expand advising services for students with disabilities. Advisers and program staff received training on providing eligible students with disabilities advising services on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary education programs at institutions of higher education and instruction in self-advocacy. Advisers connected with TWC vocational rehabilitation counselors to establish a referral process and will continue to advise eligible students in the 2020-21 year.

Advise TX Short-Term Outcomes

During the 2019-20 school year, Advise TX served 50,129 seniors in the Class of 2020. At an average school served by Advise TX, 70% of students were Hispanic, 17% were African American, and 75% were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The students served by Advise TX in the Class of 2019 were demographically similar to those served by Advise TX in the class of 2020.³ The population of students served by Advise TX is purposeful, aligned with the goals of the *60x30TX* plan.

Figure 1. Characteristics of Students Served by Advise TX, 2019-20



Source: Texas Education Agency, *High School Graduates Demographics, Class of 2020*

Advise TX Adviser Outcomes

Advise TX advisers focus on assisting students in the application and enrollment process. Both advisers and program leaders track progress toward goals set on six key performance indicators found to be predictive of college enrollment, and aligned to key strategies of *60x30TX* (including those focused on student debt):⁴

- Student actions
 - Submitting one or more college applications
 - Completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)
 - Registering for the SAT/ACT college entrance exam
- Adviser actions
 - One-on-one meetings with students
 - Meetings with students' families
 - Assisting students with FAFSA completion

³ Throughout this report, we present results from both the Class of 2019 and Class of 2020. Currently, the Class of 2019 is the most recent year of Texas Education Agency data available, while the Class of 2020 is the most recent year available from College Advising Corps/Advise TX.

⁴ Advisers track progress toward these metrics using an internal student information management system; these data are analyzed and reported on by College Advising Corps.

Table 1 shows the rates at which key college application activities were completed with assistance from Advise TX advisers, across Advise TX schools.

Table 1. Completion of Key Application Activities, 2019-20

Student actions	
Submitting one or more college applications	41,328
Completing the FAFSA	30,493
Registering for SAT/ACT college entrance exam	42,174
Submitted a scholarship application	5,962
Received any scholarship dollars	5,536
Adviser actions	
One-on-one meetings with students ⁵	44,016
Meetings with students' families ⁶	15,545
Any meetings with students about FAFSA	39,423
Assisting students with FAFSA completion	34,813

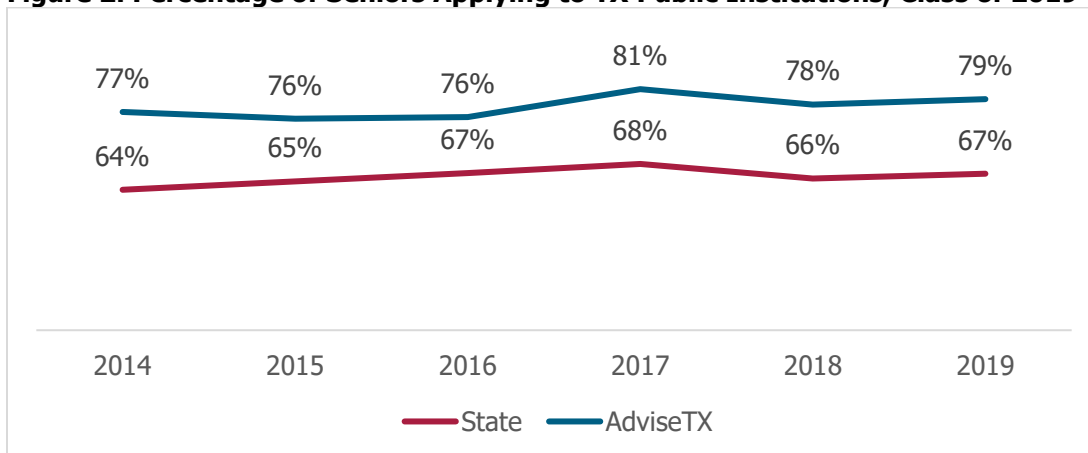
Source: EASE analysis using CAC interaction data, July 2020

Application Rates

As noted in Table 1, more than 41,000 students (82%) served by Advise TX reported to their adviser that they submitted at least one college application, either in-state or out-of-state, in 2019-20.

For the Class of 2019, Advise TX schools continued to outpace the state overall in the percentage of seniors applying to Texas public institutions, with 79% of seniors in Advise TX applying, compared with 67% of students statewide. Class of 2020 outcomes are not yet available.

Figure 2. Percentage of Seniors Applying to TX Public Institutions, Class of 2019



Source: Texas Education Agency, High School Seniors (Class of 2014 to Class of 2019); ApplyTX Application Submissions

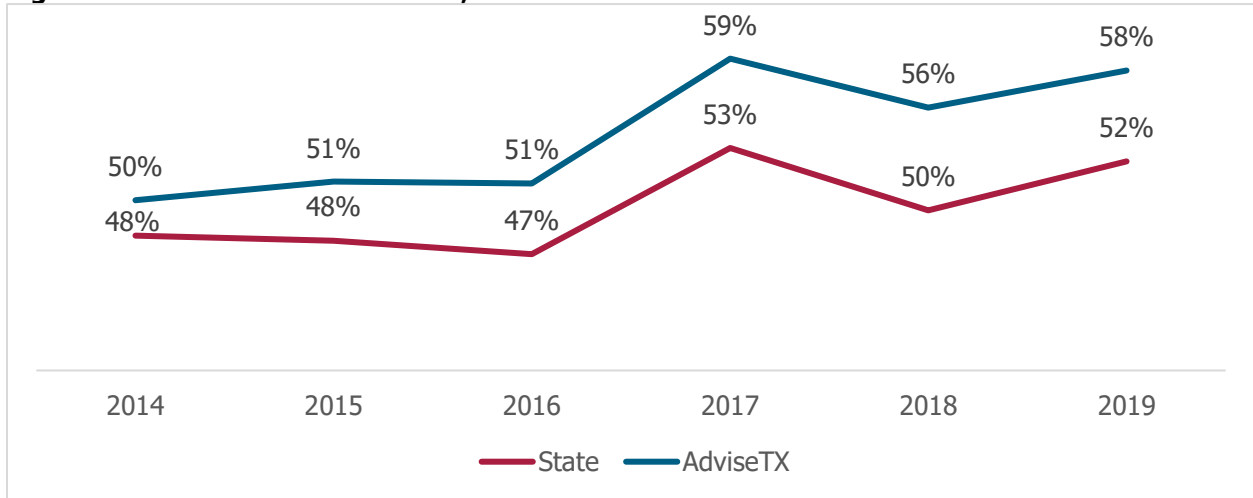
⁵ Advisers meet with many students more than once. Advisers track each one-on-one meeting held.

⁶ This represents the number of meetings held with families.

FAFSA Rates

More than 30,000 students served by Advise TX completed the FAFSA in 2019-20⁷. Advise TX schools continued to have a higher FAFSA submission rate (58%) compared with the state overall (52%).

Figure 3. FAFSA Submission Rates, 2019-20



*Source: Texas Education Agency, High School Seniors (Class of 2014 to Class of 2019); FAFSA Application Submissions.
Note: FAFSA open date changed from January to October of the academic year, starting with the class of 2017.*

⁷ Source: U.S. Department of Education FAFSA Completion Report. Retrieved on 7/15/2020 from https://studentaid.gov/sites/default/files/fsawg/datacenter/library/fafsabyhs/HS_ARCHIVE06302020.xls.

Advise TX Matched Group Data Analysis

College Enrollment Outcomes

The ultimate goal of Advise TX is to improve college enrollment rates throughout the state. We draw on an analysis of college enrollment patterns to determine the impact of Advise TX on college matriculation.

Descriptive findings. Looking descriptively, we observe that students in key subgroups served by Advise TX closed college enrollment gaps with students statewide. For example, in 2017, 2018, and 2019, Advise TX economically disadvantaged students enrolled in college at a rate that was 3 percentage points higher than the state (48% of Advise TX students and 45% of students statewide in 2019). The gap between African American students served by Advise TX and African American students statewide was closed in 2018 but increased in 2019, with 47% and 46% enrolling respectively. The gap remained closed between Hispanic students served by Advise TX and Hispanic students statewide: 49% of students in each group enrolled in 2018 and 2019.

Conversely, a persistent gap in enrollment continued for male students served by Advise TX. Approximately 3% more male students statewide enrolled in college in the past two academic years than did male Advise TX students.

Propensity score matching. A difficulty in measuring impact is to identify a suitable comparison group. Advise TX serves some of the lowest-achieving schools in the state, and their college enrollment rates are already lagging. Simple comparisons across schools will always disadvantage the perceived impact of Advise TX. To create comparisons, we use a matching technique commonly used in evaluation research in both education and health.⁸ We use student characteristics to match students in Advise TX schools to similar students who are not in Advise TX schools.

While such matching techniques (frequently referred to as propensity score models) are commonplace and can produce unbiased estimates of the impact of Advise TX, they do have limitations. The main limitation is the quality of the matching. If the variables needed for accurately matching are too commonplace or not adequately predictive, then the matches will not be satisfactory and could be biased.⁹

Overall College Enrollment. For this report, we first examined the impact on overall enrollment for students who completed high school in 2018.¹⁰ In the data we examined, across all students, the average college attendance rate in the fall after graduation was 51.1%. The four-year attendance rate was 33%, while the two-year enrollment rate was 22.8%. A small

⁸ Source: Evaluation and Assessment Solutions for Education (EASE) analysis using student-level Texas administrative data, July 2020

⁹ A common way to gauge the success of the matching is to compare the predicted probability of being designated for participating in the treatment group based on the selected matching criteria, across treatment and control groups. Without matching, there is a 6-percentage point difference. With matching, there is no measurable differences in these likelihoods.

¹⁰ This is the most recent graduating class for which full first-year enrollment data are available, given lags on enrollment data availability.

fraction of students attended both two-year and four-year colleges simultaneously, with the averages in the respective sectors not adding up to the overall enrollment rate.

In our matched comparison, we find no overall school-level impact on college attendance. College enrollment rates declined by 0.2 percentage points, but the impact is not statistically significant. It also presents a contrast in that two-year enrollments increased by 0.5 percentage points while four-year enrollment rates decreased by 1.1 percentage points. The aggregate impact across both sectors remains statistically insignificant.

While the overall rate of college enrollment is an important metric, the overall results do not reflect differences in college enrollments by those target populations Advise TX aims to serve. Advise TX prioritizes improving enrollment for low-income and under-represented groups.

Impact on Low Income Students. Among low-income students, college enrollment rates were 44.8% overall, 15.7% in four-year colleges, and 31.6% in two-year colleges. As expected, the mean rate of enrollment is considerably lower than in the overall population.

In our matched comparison, we find that college enrollment rates improved by 0.6 percentage points for the low-income population, which is statistically significant. Most of this is explained by two-year attendance that improved by 1.0 percentage point. This result is also statistically significant. Four-year attendance was unchanged. These impacts strongly indicate a small, positive impact of Advise TX, particularly since this is the population prioritized within Advise TX schools.

Impacts by Race. We also estimated the impact for different racial groups. The results here are mixed.

Among different racial groups, whites have the highest rates of college attendance. Overall attendance rates for the graduating class of 2018 were 53.5%. Attendance rates for whites at four-year colleges and two-year colleges were 26.6% and 33.4%, respectively.

Nearly 23% of African American attended four-year colleges, and 30.2% of these students attended two-year colleges. The Hispanic rate of overall attendance was 48.1%, with attendance rates at four-year and two-year colleges at 33.1% and 17.8%, respectively. About 48.7% of all African American students attend college.

We found no impact of the program on Caucasian students; the point estimates are small and not statistically different from zero. For Hispanics and African Americans, the overall impacts appear to be statistically insignificant and close to zero. These results hide some heterogeneity in that four-year enrollment falls while two-year enrollment increases. While the aggregate impact appears to be close to zero and statistically insignificant, enrollment rates for African Americans increased by 1.9 percentage points at four-year colleges while declining at two-year colleges by 1.7 percentage points. For Hispanics, the reverse pattern occurs. Among Hispanic students, Advise TX seems to lead to an increase in two-year enrollment of 1.1 percentage points and a decline in four-year enrollment of 1.7 percentage points. For African American students, Advise TX seems to be moving students from two- to four-year colleges, while the reverse pattern seems apparent for Hispanic students.

Table 2 provides a summary of the impacts on enrollment.

Table 2. Advise TX Impacts on Enrollment for HS Class of 2018

	Baseline Overall Attendance	Advise TX Difference in Overall Attendance	Advise TX Difference in 4-Year Attendance	Advise TX Difference in 2-Year Attendance
Overall Sample	51.1%	-.002	-.011**	.005**
Free Reduced Lunch Sample	44.8%	.006*	.0004	.010**
Hispanic Sample	48.1%	-.002	-.017**	.011**
African American Sample	48.7%	.002	.019**	-.017**
White Sample	53.5%	-.008	-.004	-.011

Source: EASE analysis using student-level Texas administrative data, July 2020

Note: Asterisks denote statistical significance.

Conclusion

Taken together, these results demonstrate that Advise TX is a critical partner in addressing the educated population and completion goals of the *60x30TX* state higher education plan. Advise TX accelerates college enrollment for traditionally underserved students and helps to close enrollment gaps for target student subgroups. Overall, college enrollment rates improved by 0.6 percentage points for low-income students served by Advise TX. Further, African American students saw a 1.9 percentage point increase in four-year college attendance when served by Advise TX, and Hispanic students saw a positive increase in two-year college attendance.

Key to this success is the deep engagement of advisers in the college application process of the students they serve: advisers held more than 159,000 one-on-one advising sessions during the 2019-20 school year, supported more than 41,000 seniors with college applications, and assisted with nearly 14,000 individual scholarship applications and nearly 30,500 FAFSA submissions. The path to college enrollment would have been more challenging without this adviser support.



This document is available on the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board website:
<http://highered.texas.gov>.

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