

# **A Report on the Effectiveness of the Advise TX Program**

**Rider 51  
86th Texas Legislature**

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### Agency Mission

The mission of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) is to provide leadership and coordination for Texas higher education and to promote access, affordability, quality, success, and cost efficiency through *60x30TX*, resulting in a globally competitive workforce that positions Texas as an international leader.

### Agency Vision

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.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, or disability in employment or the provision of services.

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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 2020-21, four university chapters—Texas A&M University, The University of Texas at Austin, Texas Christian University, and Trinity University—together served 108 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 schoolwide, 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 enrollment 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.<sup>1</sup> Our annual report on college enrollment outcomes for the graduating classes of 2017 and 2018 found impacts on low-income students of 1.2 and 0.6 percentage points, respectively.

In this report, we focus on the 2019 graduating class, the most recent graduating class for which there is complete data, and the measured impacts on low-income students are similar. Low-income students were 1.1 percentage points more likely to attend college when they came from an Advise TX school. Additionally, African American students saw a 1.3 percentage point increase in four-year college attendance when served by Advise TX, and Hispanic students saw a 2.2 percentage point decline in four-year college attendance but a 1.3 percentage point increase in two-year college attendance.

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<sup>1</sup> Bettinger, E., & Evans, B. (2019). College guidance for all: A randomized experiment in pre-college advising. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 38(3), 579-599.

## 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 free and reduced lunch, 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.

Over the last 10 years, CAC has 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 provided smaller percentage changes compared with the percentage changes at smaller schools.

Most recent analysis of college enrollment outcomes for the graduating class of 2019 revealed a slight decline in college attendance across the whole state compared with the 2018 cohort. However, in our matched comparison, we find that college enrollment rates improved by 1.1 percentage points for the low-income population served by Advise TX, which is statistically significant. Most of this is explained by two-year attendance that improved by 1.3 percentage points. Similar to the 2018 cohort, 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 1.3 percentage point increase in four-year college attendance, and Hispanic students saw a 1 percentage point increase in two-year college attendance.

In the 2019-20 school year, in collaboration with the Texas Workforce Commission, Advise TX advisers and program staff launched initial efforts to expand advising services for students with learning differences. In 2021-22, Advise TX advisers will continue to be an important support for students as they transition into higher education. Advisers and program staff remain committed to attending yearly training on providing eligible students with learning differences 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 2021-22 year.

## Advise TX Short-Term Outcomes

During the 2020-21 school year, Advise TX served over 50,000 seniors enrolled across the four institutional partners programs. At an average school served by Advise TX, 69% of students were Hispanic, 17% were African American, and 79% were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The students served by Advise TX in the class of 2021 were demographically similar to those served by Advise TX in the class of 2020.<sup>2</sup> The population of students served by Advise TX is purposeful, aligned with the goals of the *60x30TX* plan.

### 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):

- 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

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, 2020-21**

Student Actions	
Submitted one or more college applications	30,788
Completed the FAFSA	24,567
Registered for SAT/ACT college entrance exam	23,662
Submitted a scholarship application	5,456
Received any scholarship dollars	1,696
Adviser Actions	
One-on-one meetings with students <sup>3</sup>	84,811
Meetings with students' families <sup>4</sup>	19,829
Any meetings with students about FAFSA	26,275
Assisting students with FAFSA completion <sup>5</sup>	25,089

<sup>2</sup> In the first section of this report on short-term outcomes, we present results from both the class of 2020 and class of 2021. Currently, the class of 2020 is the most recent year of Texas Education Agency data available, while the class of 2021 is the most recent year available from College Advising Corps/Advise TX. The second section of this report on enrollment outcomes uses data for the class of 2019, which is the most recent year for which data is available.

<sup>3</sup> Advisers meet with many students more than once; this number is the total number of one-to-one meetings that advisers held with students. Advisers also held nearly 20,000 small group meetings.

<sup>4</sup> This represents the total number of meetings held with a family member (or guardian) of a student.

<sup>5</sup> The number includes 835 times that an adviser assisted a student with completing an alternative financial aid form.

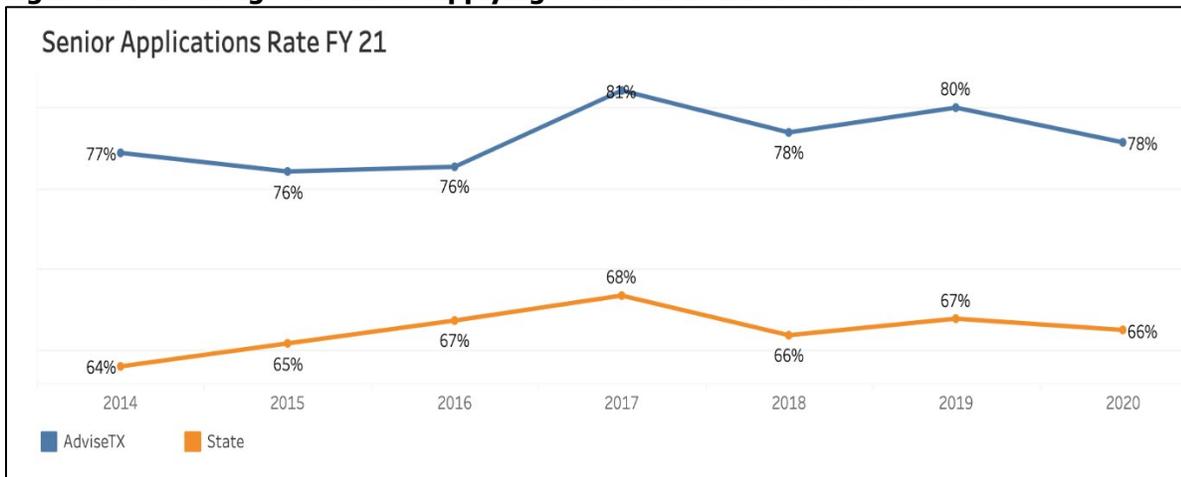
Additionally, in 2021 advisers helped students receive financial aid and scholarship offers totaling more than \$275 million, of which nearly \$50 million is known to have been accepted.<sup>6</sup> At a minimum, this means Advise TX students who received scholarships accepted packages worth, on average, about \$72,000.

### Application Rates

As noted above, nearly 31,000 students (62%) served by Advise TX reported to their adviser that they submitted at least one college application, either in state or out of state, in 2020-21. These students submitted almost 100,000 total college applications, and an adviser helped them complete more than one in three of those applications (39%).

For the class of 2020, 78% of seniors at Advise TX high schools applied to an in-state public institution, which is 12 percentage points higher than the estimate for all seniors in Texas.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 1: Percentage of Seniors Applying to TX Public Institutions**



Source: Data from Advise Texas.

### FAFSA Rates

Almost 25,000 students served by Advise TX completed the FAFSA in 2020-21.<sup>8</sup> Advise TX schools had a submission rate of 50%, comparable to the overall state submission rate of 52%.<sup>9</sup> Advisers also logged 702 alternative financial aid forms submitted, which increases the percentage of students submitting a DOE or equivalent form to 51%.

<sup>6</sup> Advisers track metrics like aid using an internal student information management system; these data are analyzed and reported on by College Advising Corps. Since some college enrollment decisions were not finalized when the school year ended, advisers are likely undercounting the total dollar amount for aid and scholarships accepted.

<sup>7</sup> Our estimates of application rates come from analyzing Apply Texas data, which are not yet available for the class of 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Source: Department of Education, June 11, 2021

<sup>9</sup> The Texas state overall FAFSA completion rate is estimated per the National College Attainment Network, representing FAFSA Completions through 6/11/2021. Compared to 2020, FAFSA submissions in Texas declined about 5 percentage points in 2021 among the types of schools Advise TX advisers serve, such as “high minority populations” and “Title 1 eligible.”

# 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.

**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 perceived impact of Advise TX. To create comparisons, we use a matching technique commonly used in evaluation research in both education and health.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup>

### *Overall College Enrollment*

For this report, we first examined the impact on overall enrollment for students who completed high school in 2019.<sup>12</sup> Across all students, the average college attendance rate in the fall after graduation was 50.5% in the data we examined. The four-year attendance rate was 32.3%, while the two-year enrollment rate was 22.2%. A small fraction of students attended both two-year and four-year colleges simultaneously, resulting in the averages in the respective sectors not adding up to the overall enrollment rate. This average is slightly lower than it was for the prior cohort, representing a slight decline across the whole state in college enrollment rates. This observed decline comes prior to any impact from COVID-19. It is focused on enrollment in fall 2019.

In our matched comparison, we find a small decline of 0.6 percentage points in overall school-level measures of college attendance. This effect is significant and represents two opposing impacts. Two-year enrollments increased by 0.6 percentage points in Advise TX students, while four-year enrollment rates decreased by 1.6 percentage points. These impacts are very similar to the impacts measured for the 2018 graduating cohort.

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

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<sup>10</sup> Source: Evaluation and Assessment Solutions for Education (EASE) analysis using student-level Texas administrative data, July 2021.

<sup>11</sup> 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 5.6 percentage point difference. With matching, there is no measurable differences in these likelihoods.

<sup>12</sup> This is the most recent graduating class for which full first-year enrollment data are available, given lags on enrollment data availability.

Advise TX aims to serve. Advise TX prioritizes improving enrollment for low-income and underrepresented groups.

*Impact on Low Income Students*

Among low-income students, college enrollment rates were 44.4% overall, 15.4% in four-year colleges, and 30.9% 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 1.1 percentage points for the low-income population, which is statistically significant. Most of this is explained by two-year attendance that improved by 1.3 percentage points. 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 2019 were 52.6%. Attendance rates for whites at four-year colleges and two-year colleges were 26.0% and 32.2%, respectively. About 48.7% of all African American students attend college. Among African American students, about 21.6% attend four-year colleges and 29.3% attend two-year colleges. Hispanic rates of overall attendance were 47.9%. Attendance rates at four-year and two-year colleges were 17.3% and 32.8%, respectively.

We found no impact of the program on white students. There appears to be a small negative impact on both two- and four-year enrollment; however, overall enrollment does not seem to be affected. For Hispanics and African Americans, the overall impacts appear to be statistically significant and opposite of one another. For Hispanics, overall enrollment appears to fall by 0.8 percentage points, while it rises for African American students by 1.2 percentage points.

The impact on any college enrollment hides important heterogeneity. For Hispanics, two-year enrollment rises by 1.0 percentage points, while enrollment at four-year colleges declines by 2.2%. For African American students, enrollments increase by 1.3 percentage points at four-year colleges, while there appears to be no impact on two-year enrollment. Table 2 provides a summary of the impacts on enrollment.

**Table 2. Advise TX Impacts on Enrollment for HS Class of 2019**

	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	50.5%	-.006**	-.016**	.006**
Free/Reduced Lunch Sample	44.4%	.011**	-.002	.013**
Hispanic Sample	47.9%	-.008**	-.022**	.010**
African American Sample	47.8%	.012**	.013**	-.0002
White Sample	52.6%	-.020	-.014**	-.014*

Notes: Asterisks in table denote statistical significance over either a 95 percent confidence interval (\*\*) or a 90 percent confidence interval (\*).

## 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 increased by 1.1 percentage points for low-income students served by Advise TX.

Other results are mixed. We find that two-year enrollments increase, while four-year enrollment decreases. This trend is true in the overall population and in the Hispanic population. However, the results for African American students are quite positive, with a 1.3 percentage point increase in four-year college attendance when served by Advise TX. It will be important to assess how this trend changes once we are able to analyze data from the classes of 2020 and 2021, whose college enrollment outcomes are more likely to have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key to this success is the advisers' focus on helping students complete key college application milestones: advisers held more than 84,000 one-to-one advising sessions during the 2020-21 school year, supported more than 30,000 seniors with college applications, and assisted with more than 5,000 individual scholarship applications and more than 25,000 FAFSA submissions. While we saw a decline in milestone completion compared with the 2019-20 academic year, this is not unexpected given the ongoing disruptions to in-person schooling due to the pandemic. The continued strength of the advisers' support during ongoing changes to in-person schooling speaks to the advisers' ability to adapt their service to students and continue to engage them in the college application process.



This document is available on the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board website:  
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