

Austin Independent School District

### **Closing the Gaps in Postsecondary Enrollment: How Research & Evaluation Shapes District Practice**

Annually, the Austin Independent School District's (AISD) Department of Program Evaluation (DPE) collects several key pieces of information from graduating seniors. Students are asked to complete a Senior Exit Survey that includes numerous items asking about their experiences throughout high school and their aspirations for the future. Ultimately, these responses and other student and school-level attributes are linked to their college records to gain a deeper understanding of the factors correlated with postsecondary enrollment. The assembled data are used in research done by the DPE on the determinants of postsecondary outcomes. Findings from the data analysis are summarized in a narrative report, and distributed to district stakeholders.

The district strives to ensure that its graduates are prepared to transition successfully to a postsecondary institution. The intensification of these efforts corresponds to a rising share of AISD school graduates aspiring to enter a postsecondary institution after graduation and, ultimately, enrolling in college. Although these ambitions are encouraging, members of the AISD Class of 2007 faced difficulties meeting their postsecondary aspirations. Only 42% of seniors enrolled in a 4-year institution in the fall or spring after graduation, while 27% enrolled in a 2-year institution or a vocational school, despite 91% having indicated that they aimed to continue their education within a year after graduation.

Drawing on the Consortium on Chicago School Research's close relationship with Chicago Public Schools, district researchers and administrators identified opportunities for integrating the recommendations stemming from the report into ongoing efforts to ensure AISD graduates are college and career ready. These opportunities included the district's Advisory and Project ADVANCE programs. The Advisory program was designed in collaboration with each campus to ensure all students had at least one adult in their school life who knew them well and to establish a forum for academic advisement and college and career coaching. Project ADVANCE was designed to help students and their parents to prepare for postsecondary enrollment by assisting students with each stage of the college selection and enrollment process.

The research identified actions to be taken through existing structures in the district. The repetitive structure of Advisory, which meets at least weekly, allows teachers to closely monitor how students follow the steps required to meet their post-graduation aspirations. ADVANCE staff members are solely dedicated to helping students complete the steps towards postsecondary enrollment. Recognizing this, the Office of High School Redesign and campus staff developed a curriculum spanning 4-years that includes a recommended checklist of activities aligned with students' post-graduation expectations. This guidepost prompts Advisory teachers and ADVANCE staff to not only ask about their students' ambitions after high school, but to ensure students are completing the steps necessary to fulfill these aspirations. Many of the milestones prescribed in the curriculum are grounded in research performed within the district.

Contact: Marshall Garland, Evaluation [Analyst, mgarlan1@austinisd.org](mailto:mgarlan1@austinisd.org) or Anne Ware, Executive Director of Accountability, [anne.ware@austinisd.org](mailto:anne.ware@austinisd.org)