



"In today's global economy, a high-quality education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity and success – it is a prerequisite. Because economic progress and educational achievement go hand in hand, educating every American student to graduate prepared for college and for success in a new workforce is a national imperative." – [White House Education Fact](#)

District Context. [Supporting Goal 3 in Austin Independent School District's \(AISD\) Strategic Plan](#), the seminars provided data to improve college and career preparation for all AISD students. The seminars also were a part of three district projects: the [Smaller Learning Communities \(SLC\)](#) grant program, the National Student Clearinghouse Pilot Project ([see p.5](#)), and the Free Application for Federal Student Aid ([FAFSA Data Access Pilot](#)).

Talking Points. In the seminars, participants explored the following issues, connected across the key data sources:

- Economic forecast data from the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) and the [Texas Workforce Commission](#) indicated the majority of jobs/careers required a postsecondary education.
- Attendance, grade point average (GPA), math achievement, college application completion, interaction with a guidance counselor, and parent involvement significantly influenced the postsecondary enrollment of AISD students (Garland, 2008).
- Varying levels of postsecondary preparation for students existed within and among AISD high schools (Pazera, 2010).
- Although AISD postsecondary enrollment rates have increased since 2002, gaps remained in the postsecondary enrollment outcomes between student aspirations and actual enrollment, across high schools and among student groups (Gossman, 2010).
- Only 29% of 2010 seniors completed the FAFSA. Gaps were found between the FAFSA completion rates of campuses and student groups (Looby, 2010).

Seminar Participants. Campus leadership teams participated in the seminars and included administrators, school improvement facilitators, counselors, Project ADVANCE staff, advisory co-chairs, and teacher leaders. A total of 126 campus leaders participated, and teams ranged between three and 28 people per campus.

Seminar Delivery. Department of Program Evaluation (DPE) staff conducted interactive data-use seminars for all comprehensive high school campuses in the fall and early spring semesters of the 2010–2011 school year. Presentations were 2-hour interactive sessions. Modifications were made at three campuses to accommodate time constraints. Generally, the seminars followed [best practices](#) for using data and were expected to be the first of long-term, data-driven conversations about college and career preparation to inform campus practices. Key data sources included the [Determinants of Postsecondary Enrollment](#) report, the [High School Exit Survey, postsecondary enrollment reports](#), and the [FAFSA completion summary report](#). The full presentation is posted [online](#) (#10.35). Seminar attendees discussed trends common across data sources, identified successes and challenges, and suggested resources to address student needs. Although the data presented were online, many staff had not had the opportunity to review them thoroughly and discuss with their colleagues the implications for campus practices. The seminar afforded staff with an opportunity to begin creating collaborative strategies.

Campus Successes. During seminar discussions, participants shared their school’s best practices and successful outcomes. Most of the successful practices and outcomes integrated information concerning postsecondary processes systemically in the school by providing consistent support at classroom, small group, and individual levels. Best practices most often identified by campus staff included

What are best practices for postsecondary preparation?



- embedding academic advising and postsecondary content in advisory classes at all grade levels;
- using core content courses to complete college preparation steps (e.g., writing college essays in senior English class or completing FAFSAs in government or economics classes);
- using [Naviance](#), a web-based tool, to facilitate and monitor college and career preparation steps;
- facilitating mentoring activities between upper and lower classmen; and
- holding multiple, grade-level -appropriate events for and meetings with parents.

What is a word cloud? It is a visual display of results from the content analysis of the data seminar discussions.

Promising Practices. Campus staff also described activities that were tailored to meet the unique needs of students in a particular school and were not employed across all campuses. These practices included

- enrolling students in Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) classes to support academic preparation for college;
- encouraging students to use checklists to monitor postsecondary preparation steps;
- conducting at least three small-group sessions for seniors with their assigned counselor;
- identifying and assisting students who qualify for college admissions test and application fee waivers;
- providing FAFSA training to all senior-level advisors;
- hosting college fairs and college visits; and
- conducting college awareness activities (e.g., holding a college awareness day, at which all faculty wear a college t-shirt, or posting college acceptances on bulletin boards).

Discussion Questions

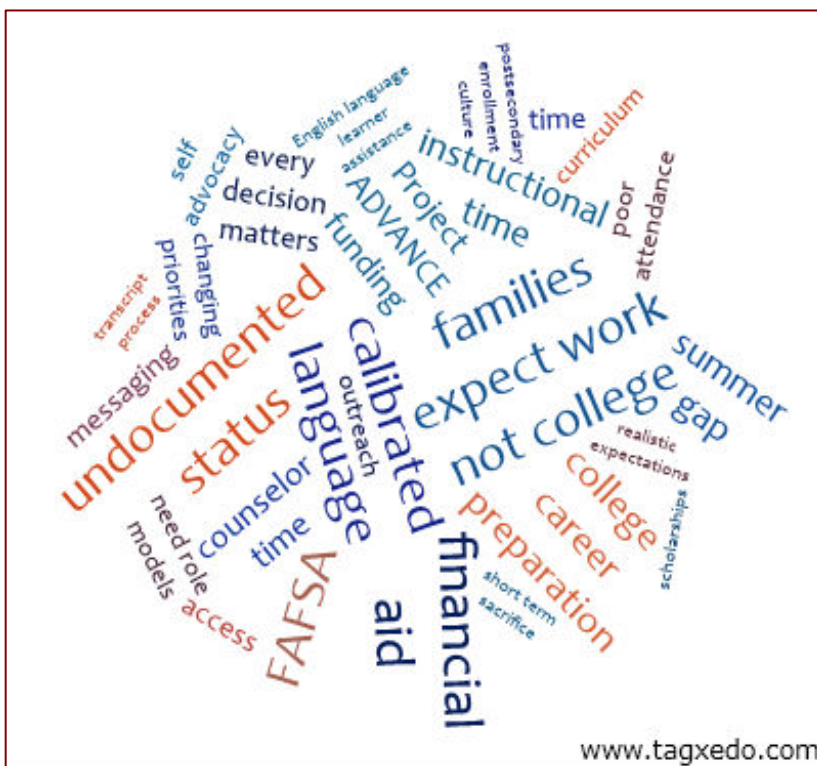
How can best practices be shared and implemented across campuses?

Who will provide campus staff with continuing support to implement best practices for postsecondary enrollment preparation?

Challenges Faced by Campuses. Campus staff shared common and significant challenges in preparing all students to enroll in a postsecondary institution. Improvements are recommended in the following areas:

- Ensuring school staff can adequately meet the postsecondary enrollment needs of all students. Counselors need time to provide postsecondary advising for their assigned students. Project ADVANCE staff positions should be maintained by a consistent source of funding. Teachers need professional development activities to support postsecondary preparation efforts in the classroom.
- Providing consistent and individualized support for all students to complete postsecondary enrollment preparation steps (e.g., taking college entrance exams, completing applications, and submitting transcripts to postsecondary institutions).
- Using consistent terms and checklists to increase students' understanding about and completion of postsecondary enrollment preparation steps. For example, seminar conversations revealed that not all school staff called a high school transcript a "transcript," and used multiple terms to refer to enrolling in dual-credit courses through Austin Community College.
- Clarifying students' and parent's postsecondary enrollment expectations. Staff reported many students and their families expected to enter the workforce immediately after graduation and were not planning for postsecondary enrollment. Campus staff suggested this was especially true for Hispanic families.

What are the challenges in postsecondary enrollment preparation?



- Assisting all students, regardless of documentation status, to access financial aid by completing federal or state financial aid applications in a timely manner to maximize financial aid benefits.
- Improving postsecondary messaging to 9th and 10th graders and their teachers, emphasizing the importance of a high GPA and remaining on track to graduate.
- Supporting recent graduates during the summer after graduation to resolve issues that might jeopardize subsequent college enrollment.

Discussion Questions

How can we address staff capacity issues?

What postsecondary enrollment supports and/or processes can be institutionalized across all high schools?

How can we better address students' and family's information and planning needs?

Campus Action Items. Staff who attended seminars were asked to develop action items based on the conversations that emerged from the data review. Two major action items emerged from discussions across campuses.

- Better integrate the postsecondary enrollment process into the student advisory curriculum by:
 - Expanding the advisory curriculum to include explicit lessons on postsecondary enrollment steps appropriate for each grade level
 - Developing advisory curriculum with vertical teams to expand outreach to middle and elementary school students and parents
- Train teachers to support students' postsecondary preparation process; teach them how to use Naviance and how to complete a FAFSA

What Campus Staff Need From the District. Campus needs for district support were wide and varied. However, a few types of support were requested that may benefit all or most high schools. The major requests were as follows:

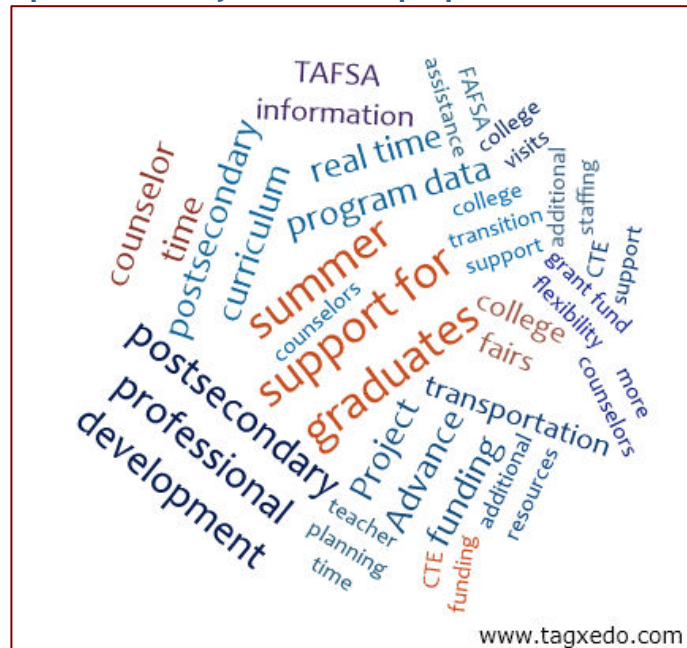
- Summer staff support for students who experience challenges to postsecondary enrollment in the fall semester after graduation
- Professional development activities and curriculum support pertaining to postsecondary enrollment preparation issues for campus and district staff, especially in the area of financial aid application facilitation
- Funding support for more students to participate in college visits and college fairs
- Additional counseling staff to reduce the counselor/student ratio
- Real-time, student-level data and reports relevant to financial aid and college admissions applications

“I had a student who was going to be the first in his family to go to college. Letting him go to college was a hard sell for his family. He had everything lined up, but at the last minute, he almost gave up because he didn't have linens for his college dorm. I talked him out of giving up.”

“About five years ago, a student received a full scholarship to Texas Tech. She was Hispanic and in the top 10 when she graduated. The following year, I found out from her younger sibling that the student didn't go to college because her family couldn't afford to move her from Austin to Lubbock.”

– Anecdotes from Project ADVANCE staff

What do high schools need to improve their postsecondary enrollment preparation for



Discussion Questions

- What resources does the district already have to respond to articulated campus needs?
- What additional resources must be acquired to respond to articulated campus needs?

Additional Information about this Report

Purpose of This Report. DPE staff recommend this report be used by stakeholders to plan support systems. This report may provide guidance for identifying and securing grant funds to meet systemic and individual campus needs. For example, staff from the High School and Student Learning Support Offices may use this report to plan and coordinate support provided to campuses. The [Office of Innovation and Development](#) may use the information to search for grant opportunities. For example, grant funds could provide support for a summer bridge program that would help graduates make the transition from high school to college.

Other Notes. DPE staff contacted principals in October 2010 and asked them to participate. The seminar was required grant activity for SLC grantees. Key data sources used in the seminars did not include data for Ann Richards School for Young Women Leaders and International High School, so seminars were not conducted with staff from these schools. A seminar was scheduled for the Liberal Arts and Science Academy (LASA); however, staff had to cancel the event. LASA's seminar had not been rescheduled at the time of this report. This report is a summary of information gathered in each data seminar. Each campus received a detailed set of notes specific to its school, containing topics of discussion and action items. Campus staff were given the opportunity to review notes and make edits and additions.

About the Department of Program Evaluation. [DPE](#) was established in 1972 to support program decision and strategic planning in the district. Our evaluations report objectively about program implementation and outcomes, and serve to inform program staff, decision makers, and planners in the district. [DPE reports can be accessed online.](#)

About the Authors. **Ginger Gossman** completed a Ph.D. in demography at the University of Texas at Austin. **Karen Looby** began to specialize in program evaluation after earning a Ph.D. in educational administration from Texas A&M University and obtaining certifications for school principalship and superintendency. **Carol Pazera** earned an M.S. in community and regional planning from the University of Texas at Austin.

Funding Sources. Funding for the data seminars was provided by grant funds and district local funds. Supplemental funds from the federal grant for SLCs funded the data seminars at grantees' high schools: Crockett, LBJ, McCallum, Reagan, and Travis.

District Strategic Plan. This report speaks to goal 3, measurable outcome 8. **Goal 3:** All students will graduate college and career ready. **Measurable outcome 8:** Postsecondary enrollment.

References.

- Garland, M. (2008). The Determinants of Postsecondary Enrollment: Evidence from the AISD Class of 2007. (Publication No. 07.85). Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District.
- Gossman, G. (2010). Postsecondary Outcomes for 2009 Graduates: District Report. (Publication No. 00.42). Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District.
- Looby, K. (2010). Senior FAFSA Submission Summary. (Publication No. 10.19 RB). Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District.
- Pazera, C. (2010). Class of 2010 High School Exit Survey District Report. (Publication No. 09.41). Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District.

**SUPERINTENDENT OF
SCHOOLS**

Meria J. Carstarphen Ed.D.

**OFFICE OF
ACCOUNTABILITY**
William H. Caritj, M.Ed.

**DEPARTMENT OF
PROGRAM EVALUATION**
Holly Williams, Ph.D.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Mark Williams, President • Vincent Torres, M.S., Vice President
Lori Moya, Secretary • Cheryl Bradley • Annette LoVoi, M.A. •
Christine Brister • Robert Schneider • Tamala Barksdale • Sam Guzman