

**From Transactional to Transformational:
Unpacking and Strengthening the Multiple Dimensions of Advising Capacity**

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Executive Summary

For decades, school counselors and college advisors have been viewed as some of the most critical educators for helping students navigate the transition from high school into college and careers, particularly for students from under-resourced communities and populations historically marginalized from postsecondary opportunities. The growing literature base on the positive effects of counselors and college advisors on students' postsecondary education and employment outcomes has stimulated a fresh wave of reforms and investments aimed at bolstering college advising capacity. However, our understanding of the most effective strategies for doing so remains limited for three key reasons: 1) data on the supply and characteristics of advisors is sparse, given that many advisors are employed by organizations outside of public schools even when they are working within them; 2) common conceptualizations of advising capacity are overly narrow, limiting our understanding of why some advising reforms improve student outcomes while others do not; 3) we lack the tools to effectively measure the multiple dimensions of advising capacity, preventing targeted reforms and investments directed at the most critical dimensions.

This study was designed to address all three gaps. First, with input and feedback from a diverse array of leaders in the college advising space, we developed and administered a survey to nearly 2,000 educators serving as college advisors, school counselors, central office staff of college advising programs (CAPs), and school district personnel who oversee counseling and advising efforts in their district. Respondents collectively work in roughly half of all public school districts in the state of Texas. Second, we conducted interviews with over a dozen current and former college advisors to more deeply understand their roles and responsibilities, challenges and successes, and the multiple dimensions of advising capacity needed to be successful in their work. Third, in addition to measuring common dimensions of *transactional advising capacity* such as the supply of advisors across schools, student-to-advisor ratios, and time use, we explored three underexplored components of

transformational advising capacity: navigational capacity, sociocultural capacity, and motivational capacity.

We conducted a variety of analyses to ensure that these new measures are valid and reliable, setting the foundation for a future research agenda examining how these multiple dimensions of advising capacity shape students' postsecondary outcomes. In the sections below, we summarize the key findings from the study and lay out a set of recommendations for future research and reforms aimed at bolstering advising capacity.

Key Findings

- Advisors and College Advising Programs are Present in Schools and Districts and Texas – Before conducting the study, we assumed that advisors and CAPs would be scarce and unevenly distributed across the state. Instead, our results suggest that roughly 90% of school districts represented by survey respondents have preexisting relationships with at least one CAP, and the modal case is districts partnering with 4-5 CAPs simultaneously. The vast majority of high school counselor respondents also reported that advisors work in their school. However, this finding does not imply that students have sufficient and equitable access to effective advising.
- District Personnel Have Mixed Views of CAP Partnerships – Despite the commonness of district-CAP partnerships, district respondents had mixed views of the benefits of these partnerships. Only 20-30% of district respondents strongly agreed that their CAP partnerships aligned with district strategy and that school counselors in the district effectively collaborate with CAP advisors.
- Advisors Spend More than Twice as Much Time as Counselors on College and Career Advising – While both school counselors and advisors are charged with providing college and career advising to students, counselors spend far more time than advisors on tasks related to course scheduling, personal needs counseling (e.g. mental health support), and

“other duties as assigned,” while advisors spend more than twice as much time as counselors on college and career advising (55% vs. 25%).

- Advising Ratios are Far More Uneven for Advisors than Counselors – Although some counselors do experience very low (<100) or very high (>500) caseloads, the majority of counselors serve between 200-500 students. In contrast, advising ratios for advisors are far more bimodal: the two most common advising loads for advisors were <100 students (32%) and >1000 students (17%). This suggests far less standardization in the advising loads for advisors and is indicative of the diverse school and advising models across Texas.
- The Advising System Creates Challenges for how Advisors – and Likely Students – Navigate Advising – Although advisors tended to be optimistic in their assessments of how effectively they navigate their role, only half of advisors tended to agree with statements related to their navigational capacity, such as understanding how their role fits within their school’s advising strategy and their perceptions of how effectively their CAP helps them navigate their role. Given the variety of advisors and CAPs working in many schools, it is highly likely that students find it difficult to navigate the advising system in their school.
- Counselors and Advisors Demonstrate both Desire and Need to Strengthen their Sociocultural Capacity – Both survey results and findings from interviews with advisors suggested the need for counselors and advisors to more deeply understand the diverse array of social and economic backgrounds students bring with them to school. This need is particularly pressing given the misalignment between the demographics of educators who provide advising and the students who receive it: counselors, advisors, and leaders of both CAPs and school districts are overwhelmingly white and well-educated, while the majority of students in the state are students of color and low-income.

- Motivating Students to Prepare for College and Career is Arguably the Most Important and Challenging Dimension of Advising Capacity – Although the vast majority of counselors and advisors view motivating students to prepare for postsecondary as a core component of their role, they simultaneously report feeling unprepared to effectively motivate students. Counselors and advisors also perceive that students’ families and personal circumstances serve as a barrier to their motivation, a perspective that could undercut their efforts to motivate students. Critically, counselors and advisors with higher student advising ratios reported less time and capacity to motivate their students.
- Many Advisors are Inexperienced and Poorly Paid – Nearly half of all advisors who responded to the survey had worked in their position for four or fewer years. Not only do programs like AmeriCorps – which provides a large share of all college advisors – typically only require 2-3 years of service, current and former advisors repeatedly voiced that low pay was a cause of their attrition from the profession. On average, advisors in our sample started out making less than \$30,000, and their base salaries did not surpass \$50,000 until their tenth year working as an advisor. As one district leader quipped: “Why is the lowest paid person in the school building the one responsible for getting kids into college?”
- Many – but not all – Dimension of Advising Capacity Grow with Experience – Knowledge of college and career topics, navigational capacity, and sociocultural capacity all increase for each additional year counselors and advisors are working in schools. This finding suggests the importance of devising strategies to retain advisors in the profession for longer, including by increasing pay. However, we found no relationship between years of experience and motivational capacity. While retaining advisors is important, it may be insufficient for developing the holistic capacities advisors need to provide effective college and career advising to students.

Recommendations

These findings lead us to a set of recommendations for bolstering advising capacity:

- Collect More Robust Data on Counselors and Advisors – Although the results of this study illuminate advising capacity in Texas, our understanding of the supply and effectiveness of advising will remain limited without more robust data collected on counselors and advisors. First, the Texas Education Agency should create a role code that allows districts to report employees who are working as college and/or career advisors. Second, TEA should collect student-to-counselor (and possibly advisor) linking data. Data linking students to classrooms and teachers has substantially broadened the research possibilities for studying teacher effectiveness. Collecting similar data for counselors and advisors would likewise open up a number of new research possibilities that could further strengthen advising capacity.
- Create Mechanisms to Document CAPs Working in Districts – To our knowledge, this study was the first attempt to systematically document the CAPs partnering with school districts across the state. While the results show that CAPs are more widespread than initially believed, the data collected through the Advising Capacity Survey is still a piecemeal view of the extent of partnerships districts have established with CAPs. Because school districts must enter into agreements with CAPs so that advisors may work in the district, these contracts and/or agreements should be collected and reported to the state to promote greater transparency on the CAPs and advisors working with our students and ensure student safety.
- Design Approaches to Align CAP, School, and District Strategy – Given the extensive use of CAPs and college advisors in K-12 schools combined with the lack of district satisfaction with CAP programs, alignment between CAP, school, and district strategy is likely necessary. This is particularly important given the diverse goals pursued, student populations targeted,

and advising strategies employed by many CAPs, that may or may not align coherently with school and district strategy. For example, guides and trainings could be created for audiences of district leaders that equip them to effectively partner with CAPs and that are attuned to the social, geographic, and economic realities of the districts. Efforts such as the Texas Education Agency's Effective Advising Framework may be a promising approach for strengthening district college and career advising strategy.

- Clarify and Support Advisor Roles and Expectations – While nearly one-third of advisors serve fewer than 100 students and likely have sufficient time to provide more intensive advising to every student in their caseload, nearly as many advisors are serving 500 or even 1,000 or more students, making it all but impossible to provide 1:1 advising to students. If we believe that *transformational advising* is needed to allow advisors to understand students' social and cultural backgrounds and provide the support needed to effectively motivate students to prepare for college and career, this can only be accomplished if advising loads are manageable. For example, if advisors spend half of their time on college and career advising, they have roughly 80 hours of advising time available to students each month. Meeting with each student for one hour per month would require a caseload of only 80 students, while 30-minute monthly meetings with each student would necessitate no more than 160 students assigned to each advisor.
- Raise Advisor Salaries – Beginning college advisors make far less than beginning teachers, despite the fact that most CAP programs require advisors to have earned a college degree. It is no surprise that many advisors leave the profession after a short time given the low pay. Although salary is not the only way to bolster advising capacity, we believe it to be necessary to recruit and retain professional advisors that can have a transformative effect on the lives

of their students. We recognize constraints on raising advising salaries, such as federal programs (e.g. AmeriCorps) that have inflexible salary schedules.

- Make Advising a Professional Career Path – While the benefit of many CAP models is their low “barriers to entry,” allowing students from diverse backgrounds and majors to work in college advising, this is a double-edged sword: there are few professional requirements to becoming a college advisor. Ensuring advisors have at least a minimum level of expertise in different college and career advising domains would likely benefit the field and further professionalize the occupation of college advisors. Similarly, although many teachers bemoan having to leave the classroom in order to advance in their careers, there are a diverse array of positions teachers can transition into: instructional coaches, curriculum designers, counselors, and administrators. There are fewer (if any) well-defined pathways for occupational advancement among college advisors. Creating them would be another way to bolster advising capacity and retain advisors in the field of education.
- Invest in Future Research Unpacking how Dimensions of Advising Capacity Relate to Student Outcomes – One of the most vexing issues in research on college advising is that a number of rigorous, experimental studies have found no effects of college advisors on student outcomes, despite both other research and ample lived experience of advisors suggesting that advising can have a dramatic impact on students’ chances of experiencing college and career success. Although research on college advisors has grown, our understanding of which dimensions of advising capacity are most critical and how they shape student outcomes is still nascent. Additionally, few studies have rigorously examined how training and professional development for counselor and advisors can develop their advising capacities in ways that will reliably lead to improved student outcomes. Future

research should build upon the present study by linking dimensions of advising capacity with how students experience college advising as well as their college and career outcomes.

Introduction

Each year, hundreds of thousands of talented students do not successfully transition into postsecondary education after graduating from high school. In Texas, fewer than half of the roughly 350,000 students who graduate from high school annually enroll in an in-state college or university the following year. Neither academic preparation nor college aspirations fully explain these patterns – the vast majority of high school students of all demographic backgrounds aspire to earn at least a bachelor’s degree (Schneider & Saw, 2016), and even high-ability students “undermatch” by enrolling in an institution less selective than colleges where they are likely to be admitted or forgo higher education altogether (Hoxby & Avery, 2012; Smith et al., 2013). Low-income, first-generation, and historically minoritized student populations are the most likely to experience this undermatch, compounding racial and socioeconomic inequalities in educational opportunity.

Research has shown that a leading cause of students’ inability to make successful transitions from secondary to postsecondary education is a lack of information and supports (Hoxby & Avery, 2012). For decades, college advising has been viewed as a key strategy for ensuring students – particularly those from populations historically underrepresented in higher education – have the information and supports needed to successfully transition into college. As part of his “War on Poverty,” President Lyndon B. Johnson and Congress helped to create the TRIO programs Upward Bound and Talent Search in the 1960s, both of which were dedicated to expanding access to college advising to disadvantaged students (McElroy & Armesto, 1998). Research has also pointed to the critical role of school counselors in shaping students’ college choices for decades (McDonough, 1997, 2005).

Although college advising is not a novel strategy to facilitate students’ college access and success, the strategy has received increased attention and investment in the past decade for at least three reasons. First, college enrollment rates are declining in many parts of the country, both in

absolute terms (e.g., the numbers of undergraduate students) and in terms of the percentage of high school graduates who transition directly into college (cite), and inequities in college enrollment and attainment persist (cite). Bolstering college advising is one of several strategies being used to address these problems. Second, at least some high-quality experimental studies have found that interventions that randomly assign college advisors to high school students may lead to significant and substantial increases in both college enrollment and degree attainment (Barr & Castleman, 2021). Third, technological advancements have led to the proliferation of lower-cost alternatives to traditional face-to-face advising, such as “chatbots,” text message interventions, and similar nudges designed to support students’ completion of key tasks on the path to college (Castleman & Page, 2015, 2016; Page & Gehlbach, 2017; Page et al., 2023). This research has led to renewed debates about the most efficient and effective methods for bolstering advising capacity.

Whereas many of the results from this area of research have been promising, these debates have also been strengthened by a growing number of studies that have found mixed or no effects of advising reforms on students’ college outcomes. For example, a number of informational interventions aimed at promoting students’ college application and enrollment have found no effects, particularly when scaled beyond small pilot programs (Gurantz et al., 2021; Ilie et al., 2022). Low-touch interventions designed to improve FAFSA (re-)submission have also failed to improve college persistence and attainment (Page et al., 2023). Even experimental evaluations assigning college advisors to high schools have at times found no overall effects on college enrollment and persistence (Bettinger & Evans, 2019).

Although these studies have helped illuminate which college advising reforms are most effective at improving students’ college outcomes, for which populations of students, and under what conditions, we argue that the majority of research in this area takes an overly myopic view of the form and function of college advising or treated advising like a “black box.” We propose a new

framework for conceptualizing college advising capacity that elucidates the multiple dimensions of advising capacity. Specifically, we distinguish between two “meta-dimensions” of advising capacity that we refer to as *transactional capacity* and *transformational* or *relational capacity*. Transactional capacity refers to the ability to transmit information about college-going processes to students and is comprised of a number of sub-components, including the availability of advisors, student-to-advisor ratios, advisor time use, and advisors’ knowledge of college and career topics. The majority of college advising “nudge” interventions can be categorized as reforms designed to strengthen this transactional capacity by providing more and more accurate information to students about college.

We distinguish this domain from *transformational advising capacity*, and suggest that it is comprised of three sub-domains that we refer to as *navigational capacity*, *sociocultural capacity*, and *motivational capacity*. Navigational capacity refers to advisors’ ability to navigate and shape the systems, processes, and relationships needed to provide students with the advising and supports they need. Sociocultural capacity refers to advisors’ ability to understand and relate to students’ unique socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, and cultural backgrounds in order to provide advising that is attuned to students’ backgrounds. Motivational capacity refers to advisors’ ability to effectively motivate students to take the steps needed to transition into higher education.

This study is designed to examine both traditional dimensions of *transactional advising capacity* such as the supply of counselors and advisors, student-to-counselor ratios, and counselor and advisor time use, as well as these understudied dimensions of *transformational advising capacity*. Drawing upon a survey administered to nearly 2,000 counselors, advisors, district-level professionals who oversee counseling and/or advising, and central office staff of College Advising Programs (CAPs), as well as Texas state administrative data, the purpose of this study is to provide educators, policymakers, and researchers in Texas and across the United States a more detailed picture of these dimensions of advising capacity. This report is divided into five parts. First, we discuss the prior

literature and theoretical underpinning of both transactional and transformational advising reforms. Second, we examine the supply of counselors and advisors across the state to illumine dimensions of *transactional advising capacity* – how many counselors and advisors are working in public schools, what are the resulting student-to-advisor ratios, and how much time are these professional able to dedicate to college and career advising. Third, we attempt to open the “black box” of advising and examine dimensions of what we refer to as *transformational advising capacity*. We explore three dimensions of transformational advising capacity: 1) *navigational capacity*, or the ability to navigate and shape the processes, systems, and relationships needed to provide students effective college and career advising; 2) *sociocultural capacity*, or the ability to understand the sociocultural backgrounds of student populations and attune advising strategies to the sociocultural context, and; 3) *motivational capacity*, or the ability to effectively motivate students to take the steps needed to prepare for college and career. Fourth, we tie these dimensions of advising capacity together and argue for the *professionalization* of the advisors. We highlight how models of advising (e.g. volunteer and near-peer models), advisor pay, and professional development and mentorship of advisors all contribute to the professionalization (or lack thereof) of the advising labor force. Fifth, we conclude with a set of recommendations we believe are critical to bolstering advising capacity.

Conceptualizations of Advising Capacity

Although researchers and reformers have employed a diverse array of advising reforms designed to improve students' postsecondary outcomes, we argue that these reforms fall under one of two broad frameworks for conceptualizing advising capacity: *transactional advising* and *transformational advising*. Each conceptualization is comprised of a number of sub-components, which we describe below. Additionally, each conceptualization frames the problem of students' sub-optimal postsecondary outcomes differently, which in turn shapes the creation of reforms designed to address the problem. We contend that the majority of advising reforms stem from a *transactional advising* perspective and propose a renewed focus on efforts to promote *transformational advising*.

Transactional Advising

From the *transactional advising* perspective, the problem underlying students' sub-optimal college enrollment is conceptualized as students lacking the information they need to make informed decisions about their higher education options (referred to as *information frictions* by economists – see Arcidiacono et al., 2016) and complete discrete tasks needed to enroll in college. For example, students may misunderstand the value or return-on-investment (ROI) of higher education. This could be due both to underestimating the benefits, such as being unaware of the earnings premium conferred to bachelor's degree recipients vis-à-vis students with a high school diploma or less (Heckman et al. 1996, 2006, Goldin & Katz 2008, Bound & Turner 2011), as well as overestimating the costs of higher education, such as assuming they will pay a college's "sticker price" when they will often pay far less (if anything) once grants and scholarships are applied (Levine et al., 2023). Students may also have imperfect information about their academic ability and whether they are prepared to succeed in college, which could cause them to make sub-optimal college enrollment decisions (Arcidiacono et al., 2016).

The administrative complexity of applying to and matriculating in college also lends credence to *transactional advising* reforms. In order to enroll in higher education, students may have to apply for admission, confirm their intention to enroll upon being admitted, submit financial aid applications, apply for housing, complete placement exams, register for courses, attend orientation, and submit financial deposits, among other tasks. The successful completion of each of these steps requires an accurate understanding of the need for completing the task as well as how to complete it. Research suggests that even college-intending students who begin the process of enrolling in college may experience “summer melt” and fail to matriculate if they get derailed by their inability to complete these steps (Castleman & Page, 2014).

To address the problems of informational frictions and administrative complexity, advising reforms informed by a *transactional advising* approach are aimed at providing more and more accurate information to students. Although the components of *transactional advising* and the specific types of reforms developed and tested under this framework are numerous, we discuss what we believe to be the key sub-components of *transactional advising* and associated reforms below.

Counselor and Advisor Supply

Perhaps the most obvious cause of students lacking the information they need to transition into higher education is the inadequate supply of counselors and advisors, the educational personnel chiefly responsible for providing this information to students. For example, the National Association for College Admissions Counselors (NACAC) estimates that the average student-to-counselor ratio across the United States was 470:1 in 2015-16 (Patel & Clinedinst, 2021), nearly double the recommended ratio of 250:1 promoted by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). Additionally, nearly one-in-five students do not have access to a school counselor (Patel & Clinedinst, 2021). Although the relationship between student-to-counselor ratios and student outcomes is nebulous given the non-random distribution of counselor ratios (Kearney et al., 2021),

at least some rigorous quasi-experimental studies have found that adding a high school counselor to a school is predicted to induce a 10 percentage point increase in 4-year college enrollment (Hurwitz & Howell, 2014).

The perceived undersupply of school counselors combined with the presumed benefits of increasing the supply of advising staff has led to a number of reforms seeking to increase the supply of college advisors in high schools or expand advising capacity for specific stages in the college-going process. As discussed previously, these efforts are not new. Since the inception of the federal TRIO programs in the 1960s, a key component of many programs designed to increase college enrollment has been increasing the supply of advisors. However, the past fifteen years in particular has seen a dramatic increase in the role of non-governmental organizations providing college advising support, as well as experimental evaluations examining the efficacy of expanding advising capacity (Barr & Castleman, 2021; Bettinger et al., 2012; Bettinger & Baker, 2014; Bettinger & Evans, 2019; Castleman et al., 2020; Cunha et al., 2018; Phillips & Reber, 2022; Sullivan et al., 2021).

Although some of these reforms have led to significant increases in students' overall college enrollment, enrollment in selective institutions, and persistence and attainment (Barr & Castleman, 2021), not all studies have found similarly positive results. For example, Bettinger and Evans (2019) led an evaluation of the Advise Texas program, which employs the model of the College Advising Corps (CAC). The study randomly assigned advisors to a sample of public high schools. The authors found no overall impact of a school being assigned to a college advisor on college enrollment and persistence. The program did appear to increase the college enrollment rates of specific populations of students targeted by the reform, including low-income and Hispanic/Latino students, but these improvements in college enrollment were concentrated at 2-year institutions. Similarly, the GO Center program, also implemented by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), assigned college advising staff and recruited near-peer, college-bound seniors from the school to

provide college advising to students. While the program increased college applications and acceptances, it had no effect on college enrollment, persistence, or attainment (Cunha et al., 2018). In short, increasing the supply of advising staff may be a necessary but insufficient condition for improving students' college outcomes.

Counselor and Advisor Time Use

From the *transactional advising* perspective, a secondary condition needed to translate increased counselor and advisor supply to improved student postsecondary outcomes is the ability for counselors and advisors to dedicate the time to provide college-going information to students. Although the provision of college and career advising is a key task for both school counselors and college advisors, the extent to which they can allocate time to this task vis-à-vis other responsibilities is highly variable. Studies have shown that counselors are often plagued by “other duties as assigned” given their ambiguous and catch-all role in many schools (Blake, 2020; Lapan & Harrington, 2010). Although college advisors are presumed to have roles more directly focused on providing college and career advising, to our knowledge no study has examined college advisors' time use.

At least some correlational research suggests that the amount of time counselors or advisors dedicate to college and career advising influences students' postsecondary outcomes. Using data from the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009, which follows a nationally representative sample of 9th graders in 2009, Shi and Brown (2020) found that the percentage of time counselors spent on college readiness activities was positively and significantly related to students' 4-year college enrollment. In contrast, time counselors spent on school/personal problems and non-counseling activities were negatively associated with students' college-going. Using the same survey data, the National Center for Education Statistics (2023) found that students who met with their counselor about college were more likely to enroll in college after high school compared to those who had not

(83% vs. 60%), with the largest differential found for students whose parents had a high school degree or less (71% vs. 49%). Thus, simply increasing the supply of counselors or advisors without also ensuring that they are able to dedicate time to college and career advising may lead to inconsistent improvements in students' college outcomes.

Counselor and Advisor College and Career Knowledge

Even if the supply of counselors and/or advisors is adequate and these personnel are able to dedicate the time to providing college and career advising to students, these efforts are unlikely to increase students' likelihood of making successful transitions into postsecondary education unless counselors and advisors have the knowledge they need about college-going processes to provide accurate and reliable information to students. Unfortunately, research suggests that many counselors are insufficiently trained for this role. Counselors report a lack of coursework specifically related to college and career advising in the majority of graduate programs designed to train professional school counselors (Hines et al., 2011 Savitz-Romer, 2012). To our knowledge, there is no systematic research on the pre-service training provided to college advisors on college advising specifically.

Additionally, to our knowledge, there are no published, validated instruments designed to measure counselors' and advisors' college and career knowledge. One possible explanation of null effects of advising reforms may be that advisors were insufficiently trained and simply lacked the knowledge of college-going processes to provide reliable information to students. However, this finding is speculative, and this hypothesis cannot be systematically examined unless reliable measures of counselors' and advisors' college and career knowledge are developed and validated.

Informational Reforms and “Nudges”

Although our discussion thus far has focused on components of *transactional advising* and related reforms that presume advising is occurring in the context of student-to-advisor interactions, the *transactional advising* framework has also stimulated a wave of reforms that attempt to reduce

information frictions or “nudge” students into higher education using digital technologies. One of the first such interventions sent semi-customized information on application processes and net costs to high-ability, low-income students and found significant effects of the intervention on the selectivity of institutions in which students enrolled (Hoxby & Turner, 2013). Castleman and Page (2015) used text-message nudging to remind college-intending students to complete tasks associated with college enrollment and found significant, positive effects of the approach. A similar text-messaging intervention designed to encourage college freshman to refile their FAFSA similarly found that the intervention led to a 14 percentage point increase in the likelihood that community college students would persist into their second year of college (Castleman & Page, 2016). An AI-powered virtual assistant – an early predecessor to the technology powering tools such as Chat-GPT – led to students admitted to a university being 3.3 percentage points more likely to enroll on time (Page & Gehlbach, 2017). Research also suggests that digital tools designed to provide students with greater information about their college options can shape students’ college-application behaviors, specifically towards institutions where students are shown to have the greatest admissions probabilities (Mulhern, 2021). In addition to their potential efficacy, these low-touch, informational interventions were embraced given their low cost and scalability, particularly in relation to more costly and intensive interventions such as increasing the supply of counselors and advisors.

Despite the initial enthusiasm for these reforms, the promising findings from earlier studies have been followed by a wave of disappointing results, particularly when the interventions were scaled to broader populations of students. A national replication of Hoxby and Turner’s (2013) college information approach with 785,000 low- and middle-income students found no changes in college enrollment patterns (Gurantz et al., 2021). A national experiment with over 800,000 students evaluated through an RCT design found no effects of informational nudges on students’ aid receipt or college enrollment (Bird et al., 2021). Similarly, a multi-pronged, randomized experiment with a

national sample of 10,000 undergraduates found no effect of text-message outreach encouraging FAFSA resubmission on students' subsequent receipt of financial aid or postsecondary persistence and attainment (Page et al., 2023). Other studies have found “no budge for any nudge” (Ilie et al., 2022) designed to promote students' college-going.

One explanation for these interventions' lack of impact when scaled is that students do not sufficiently engage with the interventions, and the lack of take-up limits their effectiveness. Researchers have tested tying financial incentives to students' engagement in scaled advising reforms and completion of college-going tasks, such as completing college and financial aid applications. Although these incentives were found to significantly increase the likelihood that students who engage in the incentivized behaviors, this approach had no effect on students' actual college outcomes (Bird & Castleman, 2023).

Transformational Advising

If one of the primary reasons students' do not transition into higher education after high school is that they lack the information they need to complete the tasks needed for college enrollment, why have so many reforms aligned with a *transactional advising* approach failed to reliably improve students' postsecondary outcomes, particularly when scaled beyond small pilot programs? Castleman (2021) suggests a number of possibilities. While text-based nudging was innovative when these reforms began to be piloted a decade ago, the increase in organizations using text-messaging to convey information to students may now drown out the effect of any particular nudge. Additionally, students may be less likely to respond to informational interventions from organizations that they do not have a relationship with, such as state agencies deploying text-message nudges or national organizations such as the College Board that sent informational packets to students (Gurantz et al., 2021).

While information frictions may be a barrier to students' enrollment in higher education and interventions informed by a *transactional advising* approach may indeed provide students with more and more accurate information about college-going, we argue that the *transactional advising* framework provides an overly limited conceptualization of college advising. We likewise argue that increasing *transactional advising* capacity must be coupled with an emphasis on what we refer to as *transformational advising*. Specifically, we contend that *transformational advising* is comprised of three sub-components that are critical to ensuring students have the supports they need to make successful transitions into higher education: *navigational capacity*, *sociocultural capacity*, and *motivational capacity*. The sections below elucidate these three sub-domains of *transformational advising*.

Navigational Capacity

To date, experimental studies of programs that increase the supply of college advisors have often ignored school environments or treated them like black boxes (Bettinger & Evans, 2019). For example, in Cunha et al.'s (2018) evaluation of GO Centers in Texas, the authors were transparent about their limited understanding of how the program was implemented:

Schools were given wide latitude to implement the GO Center as they saw fit and we unfortunately do not know the specifics of how GO Centers were implemented in individual schools. Although it may be desirable from a policy point of view to allow schools to customize the program to best suit their needs, it prevents us as researchers from learning deeper insights into the impacts of specific elements of the GO Center model. (p. 154).

It is perhaps unsurprising that large-scale, experimental or quasi-experimental evaluations of many advising programs collected limited systematic data on program implementation, given the high costs to collecting such data. Nevertheless, as Cunha et al. (2018) note, failing to examine how these programs are implemented severely limits our ability to design effective college advising programs.

This is particularly critical given the challenges many advisors likely face in navigating the roles and relationships needed to effectively advise students. First and foremost, although public schools may suffer from an undersupply of school counselors, the vast majority of schools still employ them, and school counselors are typically responsible for providing college and career advising to students. College advisors must therefore determine how to effectively coordinate and collaborate with school counselors in order to advise students. Additionally, college advisors from an external organization may find themselves in a school that partners with other college advising programs (CAPs), employs its own college advisors, or has other in-school programs (e.g. AVID) designed to provide college advising to students. This environment is ripe for competition as much as collaboration. In the era of evidence-based decision-making, advisors must demonstrate their value by showing how their efforts improve students' college outcomes. However, doing so runs the risk of pointing out the limitations of current strategies being used by school personnel and alienating the very colleagues advisors need to effectively collaborate with.

These challenges are compounded by the fact that near-peer models appear to be one of the most common approaches used by CAPs. Whereas school counselors typically need to have earned a teaching certification, taught for multiple years, obtained a master's degree in counseling, and earned a counseling certification, many college advisors are fresh out of college, completed a degree outside of education, and have never worked in a school setting. Although the near-peer model may support the development of authentic and trusting relationships between advisors and students, the youthfulness and inexperience of many advisors may pose challenges for their ability to effectively navigate their roles.

Although researchers and reformers have long argued for the importance of “instructional program coherence” (Newmann et al., 2003), to our knowledge limited attention has been paid to “advising program coherence,” particularly in the context of external college advising programs

supplementing in-school services. If external college advisors are unable to coherently integrate their efforts into school strategy, advising programs may not be sustained. For example, in Bettinger and Evans' (2019) study of the Advise Texas program, 20 of the original 36 schools (55%) assigned to the treatment in 2011-12 had withdrawn from the Advise Texas partnership by 2015-16. Although it is unclear why so many schools withdrew from the partnership, strengthen advisors navigational capacity may be key to ensuring that advising reforms are sustained and integrated into the school's existing advising efforts.

Sociocultural Capacity

Sociocultural capacity is not a novel concept in educational research. For decades, cultural responsiveness has been theorized to be a critical ingredient in effective teaching, particularly for (white) teachers of students of color (Gay, 2002, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995). In the context of counseling and advising, researchers have pointed to the importance of socioculturally attuned counseling (Sheu & Lent, 2007) and advising (Lee, 2001; Museus & Ravello, 2010; Museus, 2021) practices for years. Developing counselors' and advisors' understanding of the various socioeconomic and racial/ethnic backgrounds of the students they serve is particularly critical given the growing diversity of the student population and the persistent mismatch between the demographic characteristics of educators and students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Given the long-recognized importance of sociocultural capacity in educational contexts, it is perhaps surprising that the topic of the sociocultural capacity of college advisors or socioculturally-attuned advising interventions has received minimal attention in the field when compared to the enthusiasm shown for race- and culture-blind informational interventions designed to support students' college outcomes. Indeed, much of the research on socioculturally attuned advising is focused on advising staff at colleges and universities, rather than college advisors working in high schools (Museus, 2021). To our knowledge, no research has examined the training that college

advisors receive relating to the social and cultural backgrounds of the students they serve and how they might need to adjust their advising strategies to be more responsive to students' sociocultural contexts, and we are unaware of any instruments designed to measure college advisors' sociocultural capacity.

This dearth in the literature is particularly disconcerting given the extensive literature on the key role of college-going culture in shaping students' college outcomes (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Engberg & Gilbert, 2014; Roderick et al., 2011). If college advisors are intended to positively impact a school's college-going culture, they must also understand how the sociocultural context of the school shapes students' aspirations, behaviors, and norms related to college-going. We contend that efforts to transform school college-going culture through advising reforms will be severely limited if college advisors do not possess the necessary sociocultural capacity.

Motivational Capacity

Perhaps the most critical limitation of the *transactional advising* framework is that it places limited emphasis on the role of student motivation to pursue higher education and how counselors and advisors may shape it. That is not to say that informational interventions cannot have an effect on student motivation. For example, one of the most prominent motivational theories explicitly ties motivation to the value individuals place on an activity or goal (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). To the extent that providing students with greater information about the benefits of higher education or how to minimize the costs (e.g., through financial aid and scholarships) changes students' perceptions of the value of college, we would expect such interventions to in turn shape student motivation. Nevertheless, many informational interventions and “nudges” are not explicitly designed to motivate students per se, and the large language models (LLMs) powering chatbots increasingly being used to advise students can produce advice misaligned with established theories of motivation (Demszky et al., 2023).

Counselors' and advisors' *motivational capacity*, or their ability to motivate students to take the steps needed to prepare for and transition into higher education, is particularly critical at this point in history. In addition to COVID-19 causing the largest declines in college enrollment in modern times (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2021), the public's perception of the value of higher education appears to be at an all-time low. A Gallup poll showed only 36% of Americans had "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in higher education, down from 48% in 2018 and 57% in 2015 (Brenan, 2023). Younger adults also appear to have the lowest levels of trust in higher education compared to older Americans (Choudaha, 2022). And while undergraduate enrollment grew for the first time in fall 2023 since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, freshmen enrollment declined by 3.6%, suggesting that the share of high school graduates transitioning directly into college may still be on the decline (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2023).

How can counselors and advisors effectively motivate students to pursue higher education, particularly given growing skepticism of its value among young people? What training do counselors and advisors receive about student motivation generally and strategies and interventions they can use to promote student motivation? To what extent does the efficacy of motivational strategies vary across geographic contexts, racial/ethnic groups, and students of different socioeconomic backgrounds and ability levels? And do counselors and advisors even view motivating students to pursue higher education as part of their role?

The issue of students' academic motivation has featured prominently both in professional standards for school counselors, such as the American School Counselor Association model's emphasis on counselors' abilities to promote student motivation and positive mindsets (ASCA, 2021), and in research on school counselors (Rowell & Hong, 2018; Scheel & Gonzalez, 2007). Nevertheless, less attention has been paid to measuring and developing counselors' and advisors' *motivational capacity*, and few college advising reforms seem to take the issue of counselors' and

advisors' abilities to motivate students seriously. Fairly recent studies have developed instruments designed to measure counselors' self-efficacy for enhancing students' career and college readiness (Nice et al., 2021; Parikh-Foxx et al., 2020), but even these instruments focus on counselors' abilities to provide students with college and career information rather than their abilities to effectively motivate students to prepare for college and career. Given the importance of student motivation to students' academic outcomes (Howard et al., 2021), we argue that understanding and developing counselors' and advisors' motivational capacity is a critical future direction for research.

Methods

Our investigation of college advising capacity consisted of four methods. First, we conducted informal interviews and focus groups with college advising subject matter experts (SMEs) in order to explore their perceptions of different dimensions of college advising capacity, their importance, and how to measure them. These SMEs included personnel from the Texas Education Agency (TEA), Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), and Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) who oversee college and career advising, executives and directors of CAPs, and district-level personnel responsible for counseling and advising in their districts.

Second, we developed and fielded a survey to individuals involved in college advising across Texas. The survey was targeted at four distinct populations of individuals knowledgeable of or responsible for providing college and career advising to K-12 students:

- 1) district-level personnel who oversee counseling and/or advising;
- 2) central office staff of college advising programs;
- 3) licensed counselors (e.g. professional school counselors, licensed professional counselors working in school settings), and;
- 4) advisors (i.e. non-counselors whose primary role includes providing college and/or career advising to students).

The survey was launched in mid-April, 2023 and remained open until early June, 2023. It was distributed to listservs comprised of counselors and advisors and directly to CAP staff. TxCAN offered gift card incentives between \$20-\$50 dollars for randomly selected respondents who completed the survey by three specific dates. The survey generated 1,982 responses. Figure 1 shows the number of respondents for each of the roles respondents could select at the beginning of the survey.

Figure 1: Number of Advising Capacity Survey Responses, by Role

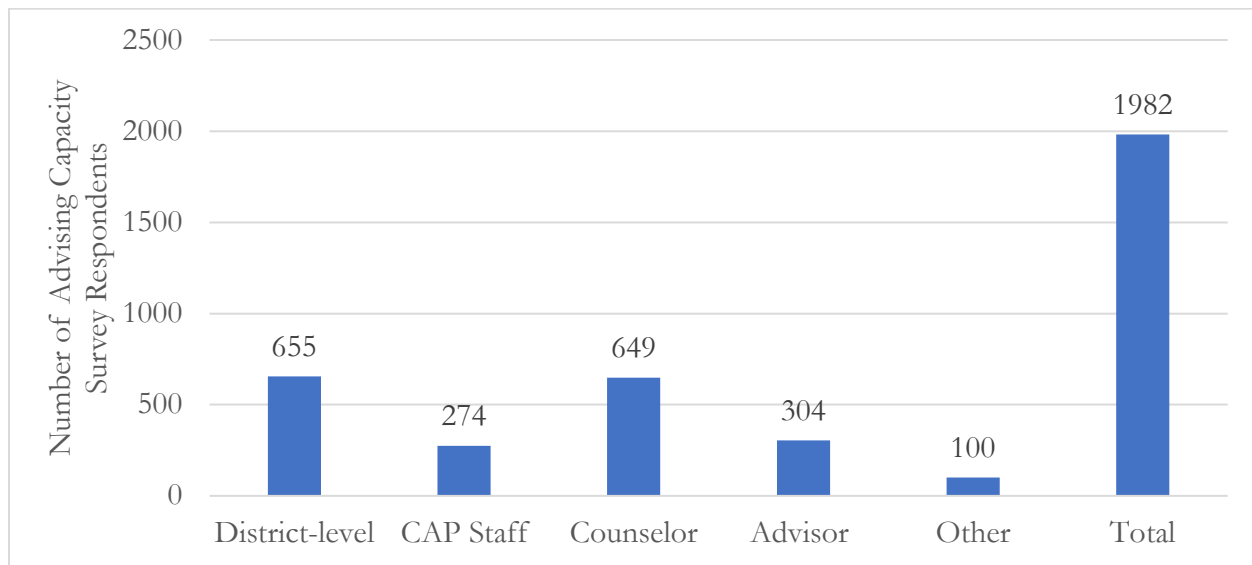
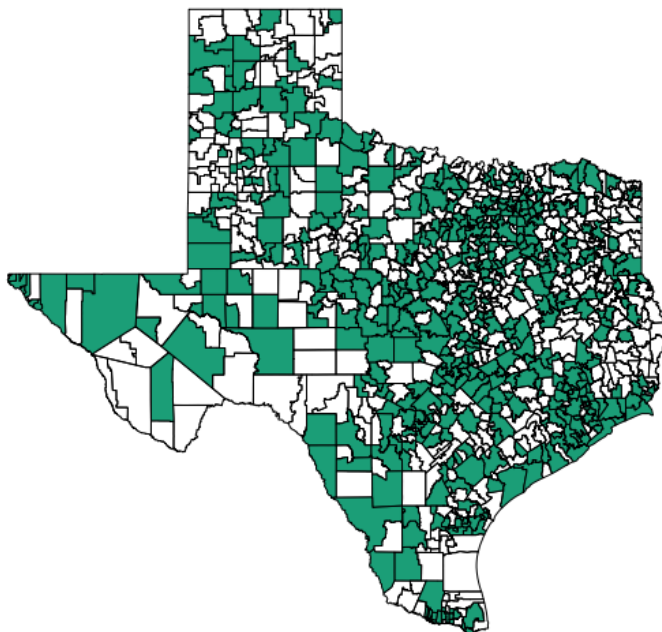


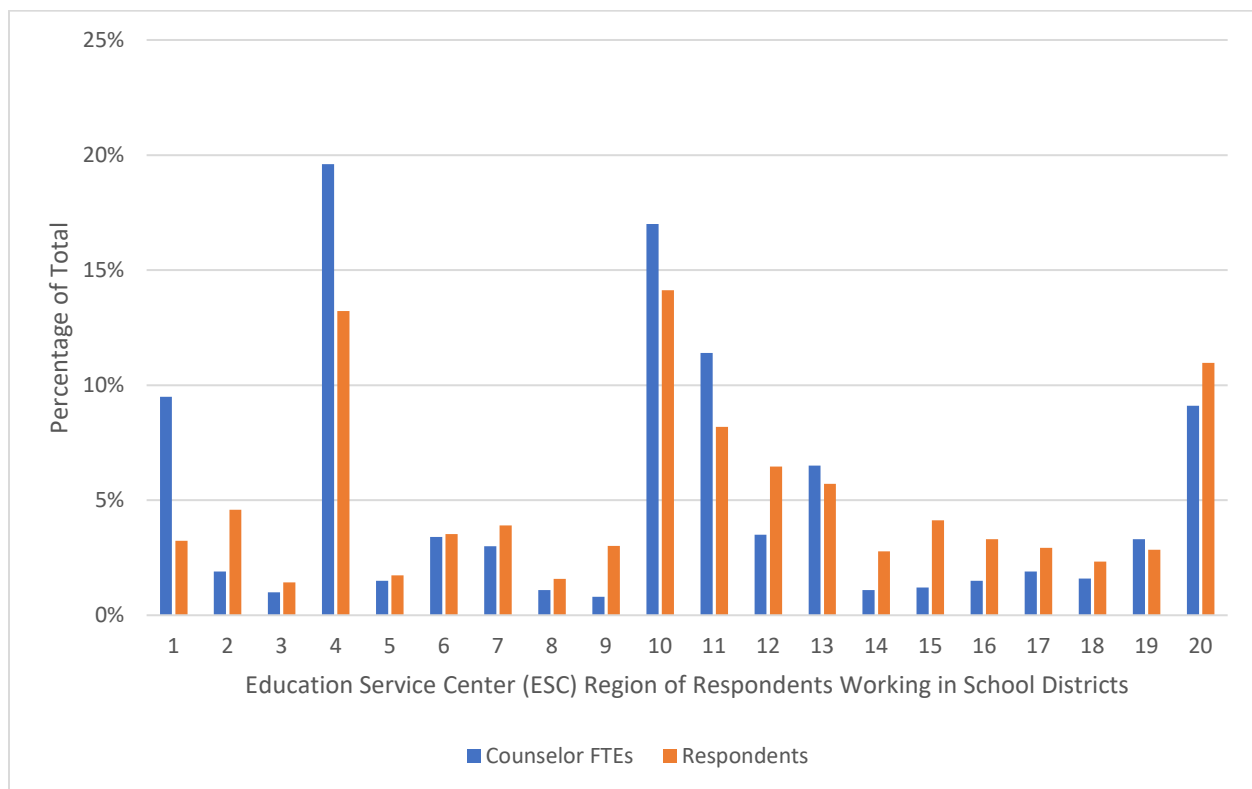
Figure 2 presents a map that includes the geographic boundaries of nearly every school district in Texas (charter schools do not have distinct geographic boundaries and are therefore not included on the map). Districts that had at least one respondent, whether a district-level respondent or a school-level counselor or advisor working in that district, are shaded in green. The map highlights that respondents came from every region of the state of Texas.

Figure 2: Map of School Districts with at least One Respondent to Advising Capacity Survey



In order to examine the representativeness of the sample of survey respondents, we compared the geographic distribution of respondents based on the Education Service Center (ESC) where their school district is located to the distribution of counselor FTEs as a proxy for the “pool” of potential survey respondents. Figure 3 presents these distributions. The results suggest that survey respondents are generally representative of the geographic spread of educators across Texas, although respondents from the more populous regions areas such as the Rio Grande Valley (ESC 1), Houston (ESC 4), Dallas (ESC 10), and Fort Worth (ESC 11) were somewhat underrepresented compared to respondents from more rural or sparsely populated regions.

Figure 3: Distribution of Counselor FTEs and Advising Capacity Survey Respondents, by Education Service Center (ESC) Region



The survey was comprised of a number of sections or “blocks” related to different components of advising capacity. Only question blocks relevant to respondents were shown to them. For example, the survey included a set of questions specific to central office staff of college

advising programs (CAPs) that explored how CAPs recruit and train their advisors, the school and student populations they target, and the challenges and opportunities they have working with school districts. Only CAP central office staff responded to these questions. Table 1 below presents the sections of the survey and which group(s) of respondents completed each section.

Table 1: College Advising Capacity Survey Flow

	District	CAP Staff	Counselors	Advisors
Intro	All	All	All	All
District Professional Questions	All			
CAP Staff Questions		All		
Time Capacity			All	All
Advising Knowledge			All	All
Sociocultural Capacity			All	All
Navigational Capacity				All
Advisor Training and PD				All
Motivational Capacity			MS & HS	MS & HS
HS Advising			HS	HS
HS Campus Counseling Strategy			HS	
College and Career Knowledge Assessment			Optional	Optional

Because many of the survey questions were developed and administered for the first time through the Advising Capacity Survey, we began by examining the measures to ensure they were appropriate to use in subsequent analyses. We used exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to determine which items were related to theorized constructs. In general, we sought to include items with factor loadings of at least 0.4 onto the theorized construct that did not also load greater than 0.4 onto a different construct. We then used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ensure that the measurement models of theorized constructs had acceptable fit and calculated the Cronbach's alpha of the items aligned to each construct. This process resulted in newly developed measures related to our key constructs of time capacity, sociocultural capacity, motivational capacity, and navigational capacity used in subsequent analyses. The Technical Appendix includes the results of these measurement analyses.

Third, we utilized data from Texas's statewide longitudinal data system known as the Education Research Center (ERC) to assess the supply of school counselors in Texas. The ERC contains data on every student and employee in Texas public schools. We used data on public education employees to calculate the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) counselors across the state and divided the number of students enrolled in each school by counselor FTEs in order to calculate the student-to-counselor ratio of the school. We then examined how counselor FTEs varied across school levels (elementary, middle/junior high, high school, and integrated) as well as by the urbanicity of the school.¹

The fourth method we employed was semi-structured interviews with current and former college advisors. The purpose of these interviews was to inquire about participants' experiences working as advisors, including the training and professional development they received prior to and after beginning working as an advisor, their role on the campus, and the obstacles they faced as an advisor. A coding scheme was developed based on the dimensions of advising capacity explored through the Advising Capacity Survey, and transcriptions of the interviews were coded for these themes.

Limitations

Before presenting our results, we highlight three key limitations of the study the reader should bear in mind. First, the analyses rely upon survey data from individuals who volunteered to participate. While survey respondents are generally geographically representative of the distribution of educators across the state, educators who opt into a voluntary survey may be systematically different than those who choose not to in unknown ways. They may have more free time to complete surveys (which could bias estimates of time use), they may be more passionate about

¹ For information about how the Texas Education Agency defines district urbanicity categories, see: <https://tea.texas.gov/reports-and-data/school-data/district-type-data-search/district-type-glossary-of-terms-2019-20>.

college and career advising (which could bias estimates of perceptions of advising), or they may be more knowledgeable about college and career topics (which could bias estimates of college and career knowledge). We caution against generalizing to the full population of counselors and advisors across the state without keeping these caveats in mind.

Second, survey respondents may be influenced by social desirability bias, where they respond in ways they think they should rather than offering their true beliefs. This may be particularly relevant for more sensitive topics, such as perceptions of counselors' and advisors' sociocultural capacity. We attempted to frame survey questions in ways that would limit this social desirability bias, such as asking respondents the extent to which they struggled to advise students of *certain backgrounds* rather than identifying specific demographic groups who counselors and advisors may have difficulty advising. Nevertheless, respondents may be inclined to overstate their advising capacity.

Third, a primary purpose of the Advising Capacity Survey was to examine novel dimensions of advising capacity and develop measures to assess them. While these constructs may have *face validity*, it remains unknown whether they have *predictive validity*. Future research would be needed to examine the extent to which the different dimensions of advising capacity discussed in this report meaningfully shape students' college and career outcomes.

Transactional Advising Capacity

We begin with a simple question: To what extent is formal college advising available to high school students? By “formal,” we mean the advising is provided in intentional ways by individuals who have the training, role, and purpose of providing advising and in the context of formal schooling, as distinguished by informal advice that students may receive from parents, relatives, friends, and the like. In order for a student to receive college and career advising – regardless of its content, quality, or effectiveness – three conditions must be met. First, individuals responsible for providing college and career advising must work in the school. Second, these individuals must be able to allocate a sufficient amount of their time to providing college and career advising. Third, their caseloads and the resulting student-to-advisor ratios must be reasonable to allow them to actually meet with students and provide advisement. The sections below present our results related to each component of advising availability.

Advisors and College Advising Programs are Widespread

Although examining the supply of advisors is the logical first step to determining advising capacity, it is surprisingly difficult to do so. The primary reason is the lack of available administrative data that could be used to answer this question. In states such as Texas, school districts are required to provide a list of all educators they employ to the State Education Agency (SEA), with associated information such as each educator’s role. I’ve used such data in the past to calculate the student-to-counselor ratio in every public school in Texas and examine how factors such as school level, size, demographics, and urbanicity relate to the student-to-counselor ratio. However, no comparable data exists for college advisors. Because there is no role code for college advisors, even those employed by school districts cannot be reported as much. The challenge is compounded by the fact that many college advisors are employed by outside organizations and simply placed in schools, and only the College Advising Programs (CAPs) maintain data on the advisors they employ.

Because of the lack of administrative data, we examined data from the Advising Capacity Survey to address this question. We asked district-level respondents about the number of CAPs their district is working with as well as the number of college advisors working in their district, whether employed by the district or a CAP. Figure 4 presents the number of CAPs districts report working with. Only 11% of district respondents reported working with zero CAP vendors, while the modal case was 4-5 CAP partnerships (52% of respondents). Because districts in more rural regions of the state were overrepresented among survey respondents compared to districts in the large metropolitan regions, this finding is unlikely to be biased by disproportionate response rates from urban districts.

Figure 4: Number of CAPs Texas Public School Districts are Working With

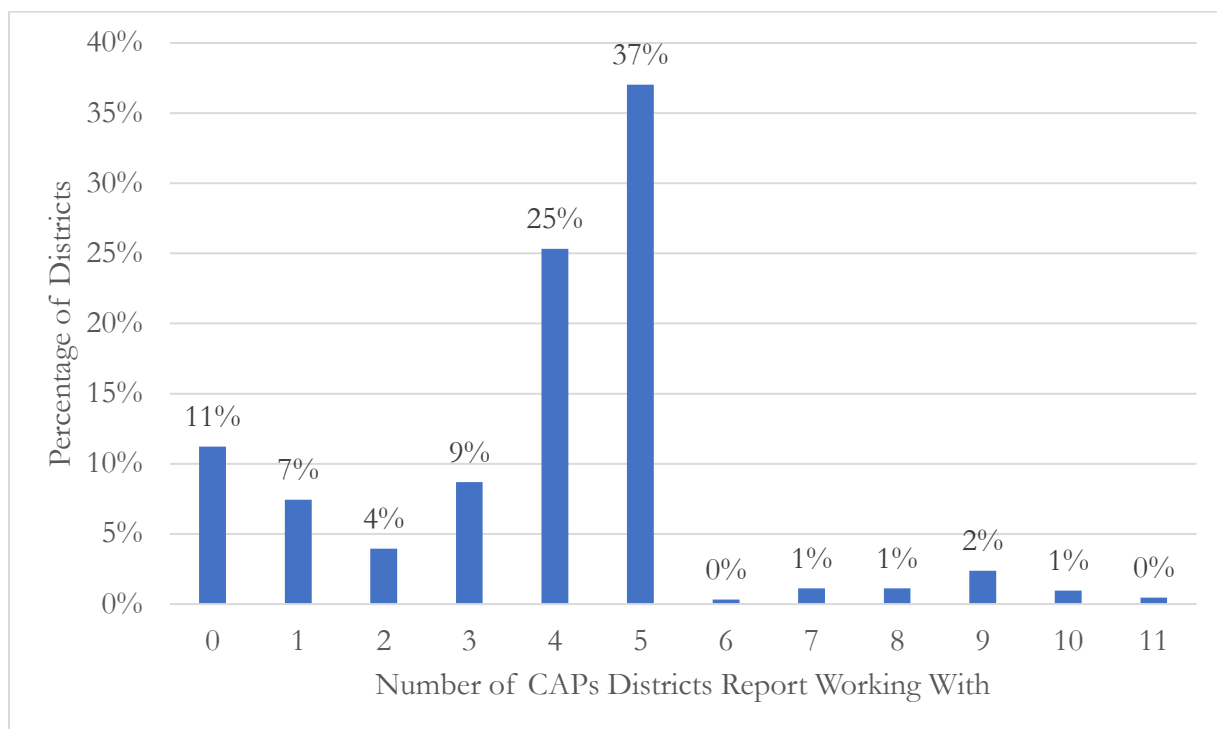
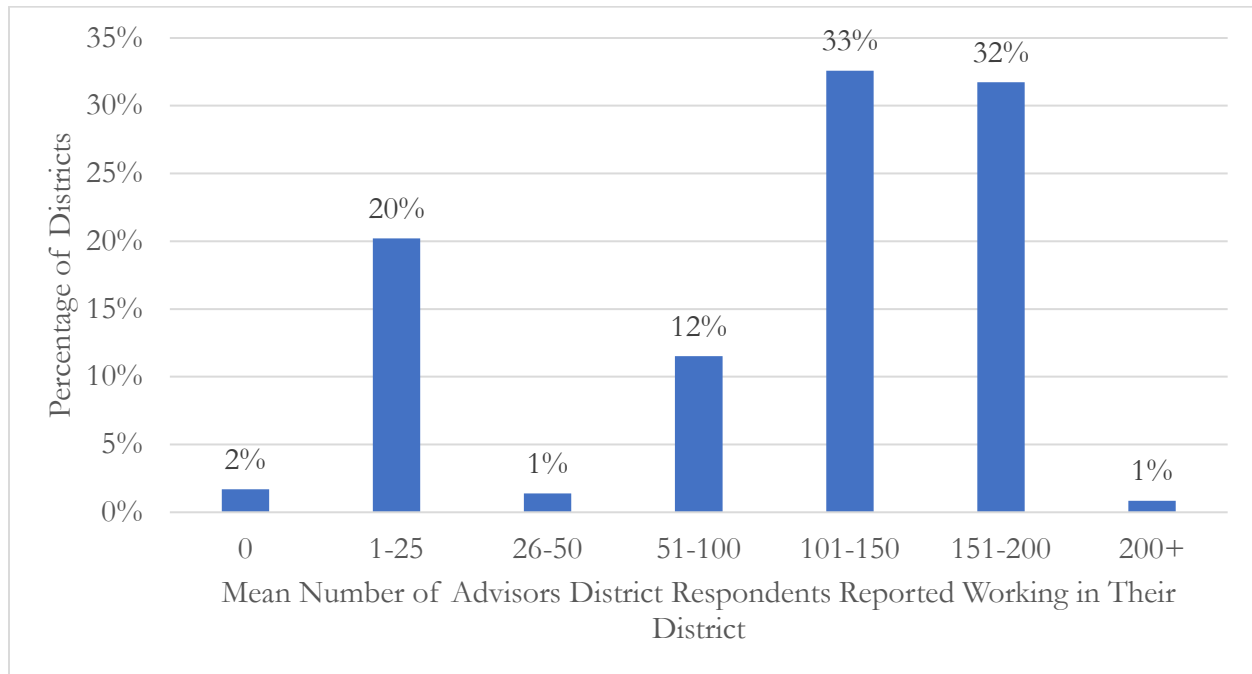


Figure 5 presents the number of advisors that district respondents reported are working in their district. In this case, only 2% of respondents reported that zero advisors were working in their district, even lower than the 11% of respondents who reported zero CAP partnerships. This finding suggests that even districts with no CAP partnerships may employ college and/or career advisors,

given that 11% of districts reported no CAP partnerships but only 2% of districts reported no advisors working in their districts. Nearly two-thirds of respondents reported between 101-200 advisors were working in their district, although one-fifth of district respondents reported only 1-25 advisors employed.

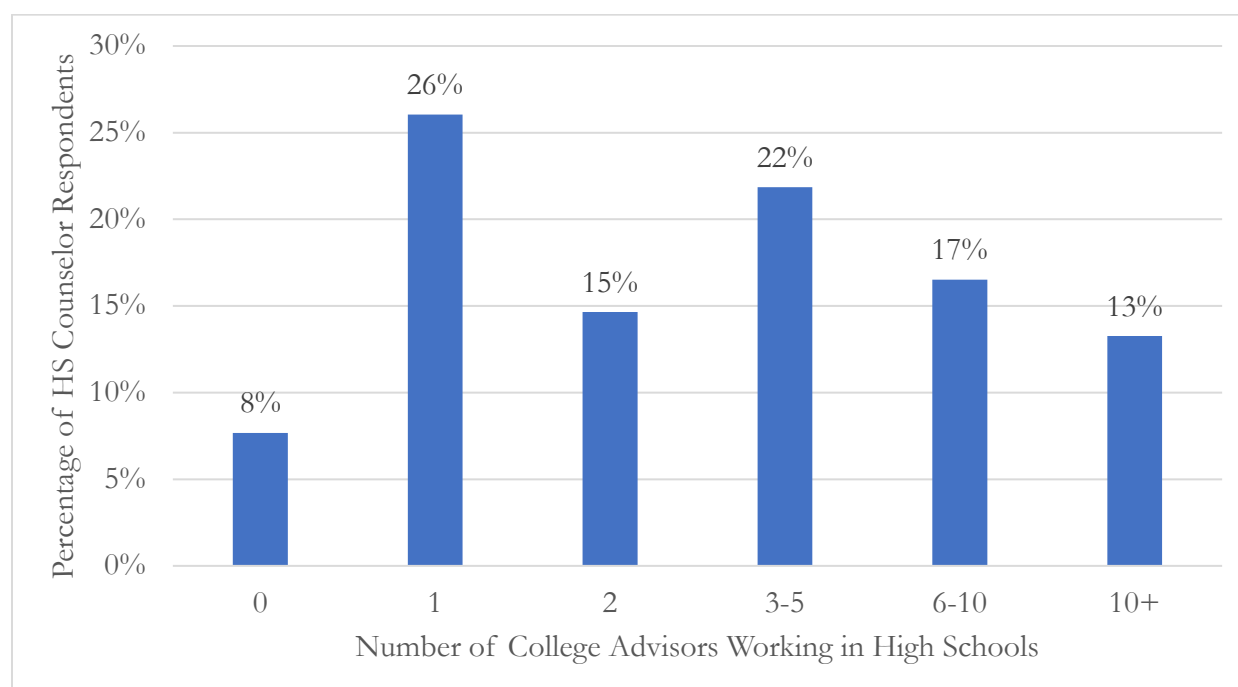
Figure 5: The Number of Advisors Working in Texas Public School Districts



Because districts vary in terms of the number of schools in the district, the above results are a rough proxy for the availability of advisors within high schools. We therefore asked high school counselors specifically about the number of advisors working in their school. In the survey question, we defined advisors as “people whose primary responsibilities include postsecondary and/or career advising, excluding counselors and certified teachers.” The results are presented in Figure 4.

Although the figures are lower than the estimates of the district-wide supply of advisors, they similarly imply that advisors are widespread. Only 8% of counselor respondents reported no advisors working in their school. In contrast, more than 40% of counselors reported 1-2 advisors worked in their school, 22% reported 3-5 advisors, and 30% reported six or more advisors.

Figure 6: The Number of Advisors Working in High Schools as Reported by Counselors



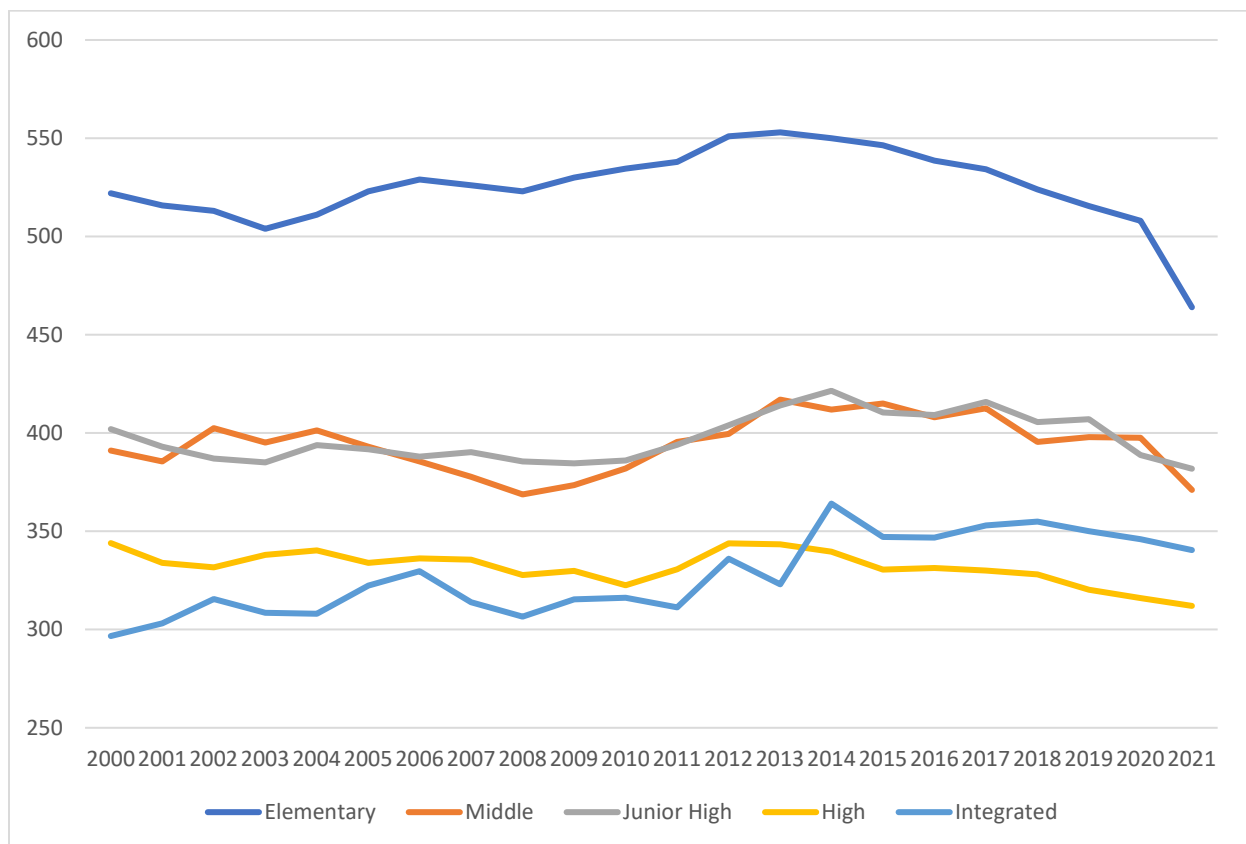
It should be underscored that these estimates come from a non-random sample of educator respondents from across Texas. Although the distribution of respondents across educational regions of the state was comparable to the distribution of counselors, it is difficult to say how representative the sample is of the full population of schools and districts in Texas and – if unrepresentative – whether the bias is positive or negative. Nevertheless, at least for the more than 1,000 district-level professionals and high school counselors who responded to these survey questions, the results suggest advisors and CAPs are far more widespread than traditionally assumed.

Advising Ratios are Highly Variable, Particularly for Advisors

Because Texas collects administrative data for every school counselor working in public schools, we are able to calculate student-to-counselor ratios for every school in the state. Figure 7 visualizes median student-to-counselor full-time equivalent (FTE) ratios from 2000-2022 and disaggregated by school grade level. Three findings are apparent from this figure. First, student-to-counselor ratios are lower for students in higher grade levels. Elementary schools had one counselor

FTE for every 500-550 students for the majority of this time period, while the ratios are roughly 400:1 for middle and junior high schools and 300-350:1 for high schools and integrated schools (e.g. K-12, 6-12). Second, the trends suggest there may have been a decline in student-to-counselor ratios in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in elementary schools and middle schools, though there is less of a drop among other school types. Third, although median student-to-counselor ratios are lower at high schools, they are still above the maximum ratio of 250:1 recommended by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and encouraged by the Texas Education Agency (TEA).²

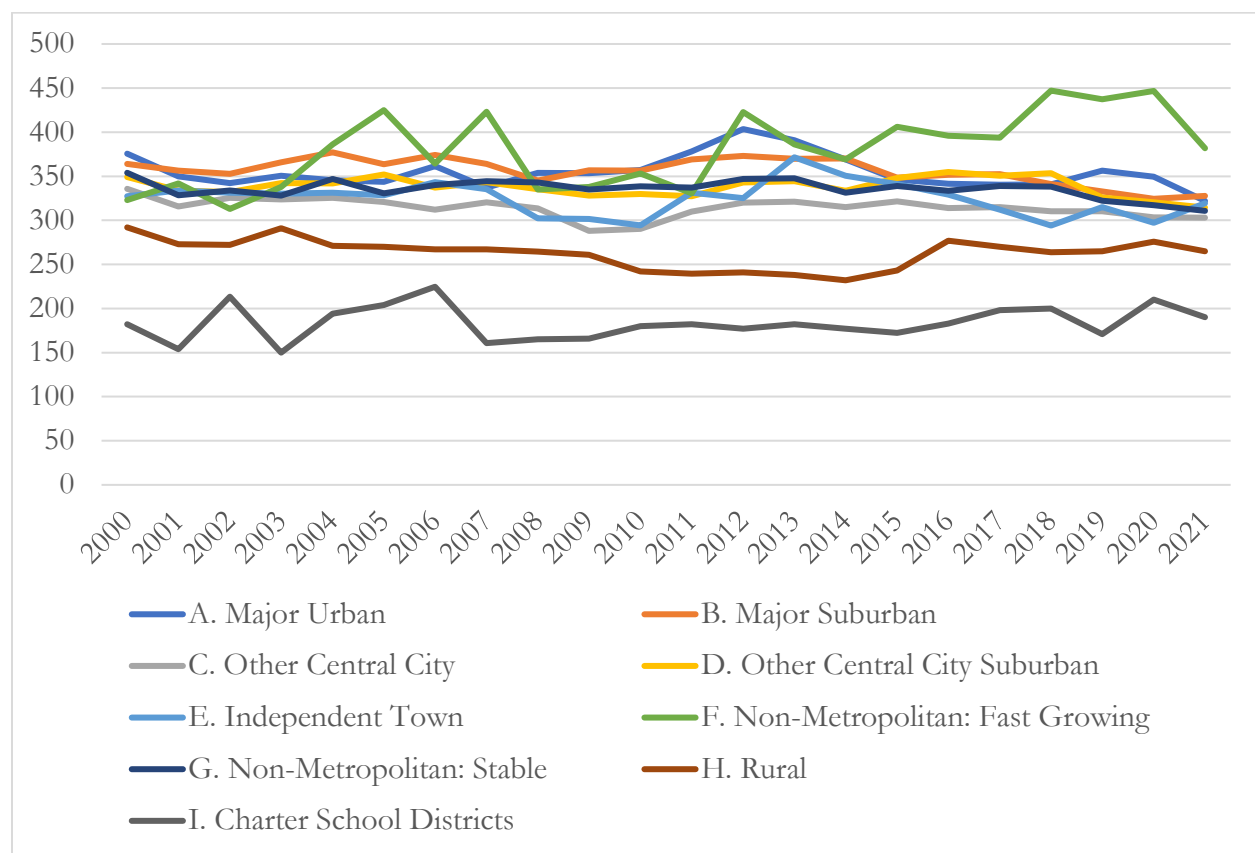
Figure 7: Median Student-to-Counselor Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Ratios in Texas Public Schools, by Year and School Grade Levels



² <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/learning-support-and-programs/school-guidance-and-counseling/school-counseling-faqs>

Figure 8 examines student-to-counselor ratios only at Texas public high schools and disaggregated by the urbanicity of the school district.³ Four findings are noteworthy from this analysis. First, there is minimal variation in student-to-counselor ratios among the majority of school district types. Second, charter school districts are a clear exception, with a median student-to-counselor ratio of 200:1 whereas the majority of district types have a median ratio of 300-350:1. Third, among non-charter districts, rural districts have had a lower student-to-counselor ratio for the entire two-decade period shown in the figure. Fourth, while non-metropolitan: fast growing districts had similar student-to-counselor ratios compared to the majority of district types for much of this time period, their ratios have been closer to 400-450:1 since 2015.

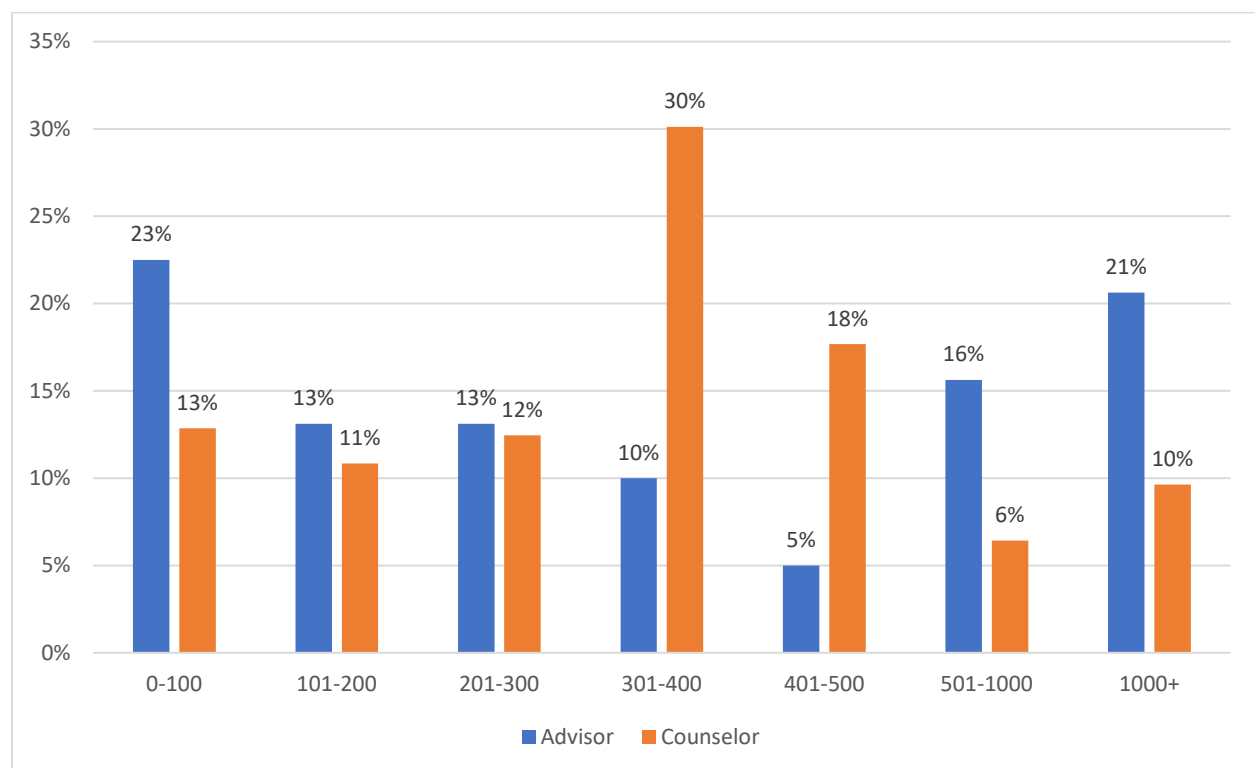
Figure 8: Median Student-to-Counselor Ratios at Texas Public High Schools, by Urbanicity and Year



³ For information about how the Texas Education Agency defines district urbanicity categories, see: <https://tea.texas.gov/reports-and-data/school-data/district-type-data-search/district-type-glossary-of-terms-2019-20>.

Although Texas administrative data allows us to calculate student-to-counselor ratios for every public school, counselors may only advise a subset of the students at their school, and Texas does not collect administrative data on the advisors working in schools. We therefore asked respondents to the Advising Capacity Survey to self-report their advising ratios. Figure 8 presents these ratios specifically for counselors and advisors working in high schools. Interestingly, the two most common ratios for school counselors (301-400 and 401-500) are the least common models for advisors. Whereas the majority of counselors have advising loads in the middle of the range, advising ratios for advisors are far more bimodal. The two most common ratios for advisors are the lowest range (0-100 students) and the highest (1000+ students). Although the median advising ratios for counselors and advisors working in high schools are similar (360:1 vs. 320:1, respectively), the results suggest counselors most frequently working in medium-load environments, while advisors more commonly have quite high or quite low advising loads.

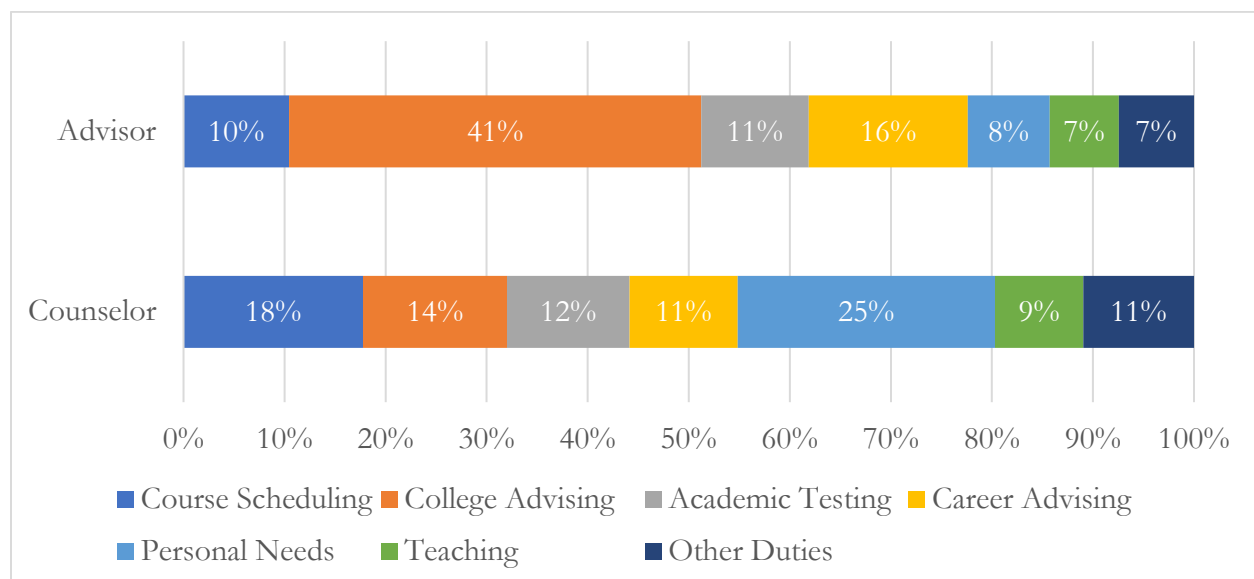
Figure 9: Self-Reported Student Ratios for High School Counselors and Advisors



Counselors Have Less Time for College and Career Advising than Advisors

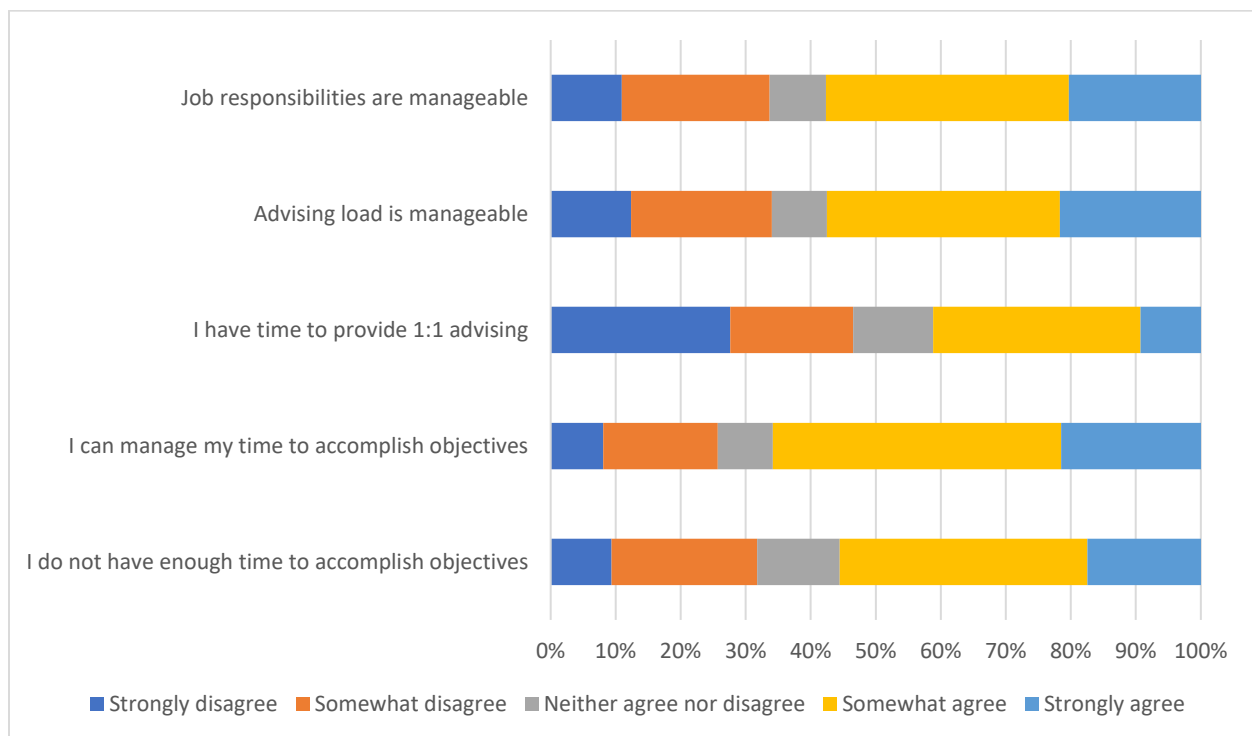
Advising ratios are critical because they either constrain or enable the intensity of advising that can be made available to students. A key question is whether counselors and advisors are able to allocate their time to college and career advising activities in the face of other roles and job responsibilities placed upon them. Although it is reasonable to assume that counselors and advisors with higher caseloads have less time for college and career advising, we examined time capacity further by asking counselors and advisors to report how much time they are able to allocate do different tasks. As shown in Figure 7, counselors and advisors have fundamentally different roles in campuses. While advisors are able to allocate more than half of their time to college (41%) and career (15%) advising, counselors are only able to dedicate one-quarter of their time to college (14%) and career (11%) advising. In contrast, counselors spend one-quarter of their time on personal needs counseling, more than three times the rate of advisors (8%). Although the differences between counselors' and advisors' time use are notable, it should also be underscored that both are required to perform duties that are outside of their formally defined roles. Counselors spend roughly 20% of their time on teaching (9%) and "other duties as assigned" (11%).

Figure 10: Average Time Allocation for Advisors and Counselors



In addition to asking counselors and advisors how much time they have to allocate to different tasks, we asked them a set of questions to gauge their perceptions of their overall time capacity. Their responses are presented in Figure 10. Overall, counselors and advisors have mixed views on the time they have for advising. Although the majority of respondents somewhat or strongly agreed to all but one of the questions, still less than one-quarter of respondents strongly agreed with each of the statements. Critically, the statement respondents were least likely to agree with was whether they had time to provide 1:1 advising to their students. Nearly 30% of respondents strongly disagreed with this statement, and fewer than half somewhat or strongly agreed. Fewer than 10% of counselors and advisors believe they have the time they need to provide 1:1 advising to their students.

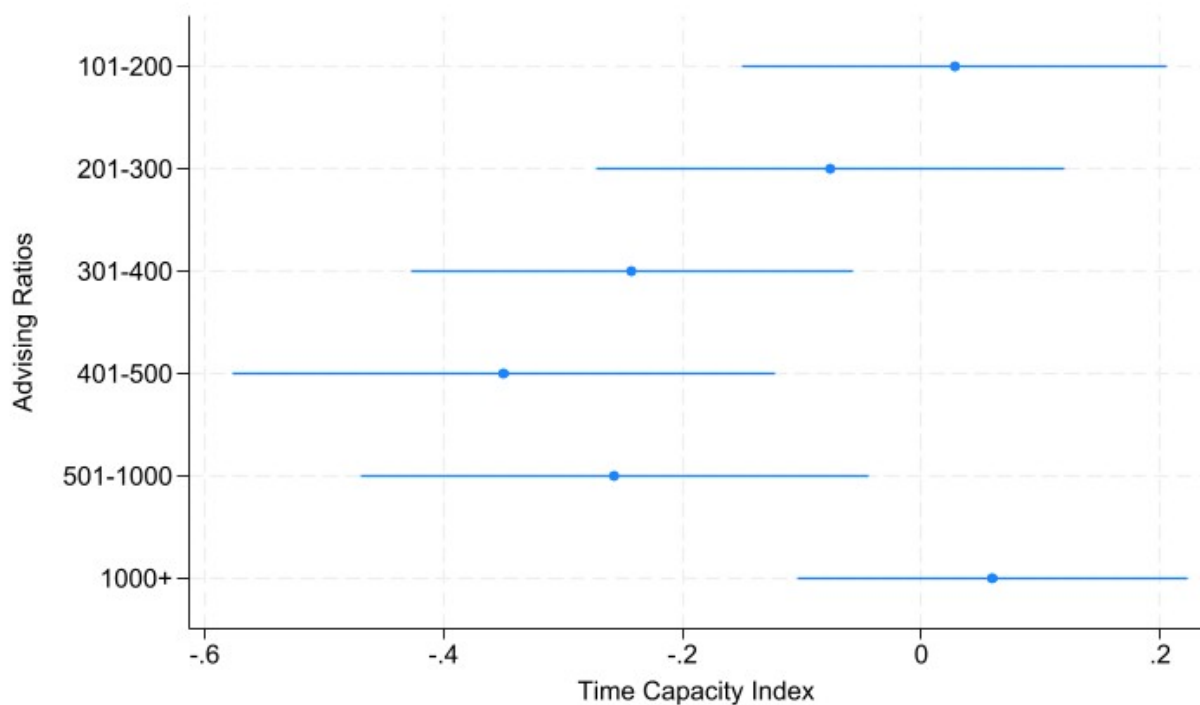
Figure 11: Counselor and Advisor Perceptions of Time Capacity



To test the hypothesis that counselors and advisors with higher advising loads have less time to provide advising to their students, we created an index measuring time capacity by combining the

items in Figure 10 and then estimated the relationship between advising ratios and time capacity using a linear regression model, controlling for respondents' roles (e.g. counselor vs. advisor) and the grade level of the school in which they work. This relationship is shown in Figure 11. Compared to the reference group (counselors and advisors with 1-100 students), we find no significant differences in time capacity for counselors and advisors who advise 101-200 or 201-300 students. However, we do see a general trend where time capacity declines as ratios increase, and counselors and advisors with between 301-1000 students do report significantly less advising capacity compared to the reference group. Interestingly, this pattern changes for respondents advising more than 1,000 students. Although speculative, it may be the case that these advisors are employing virtual advising strategies that allow them to provide 1:1 advising to substantial numbers of student simultaneously.

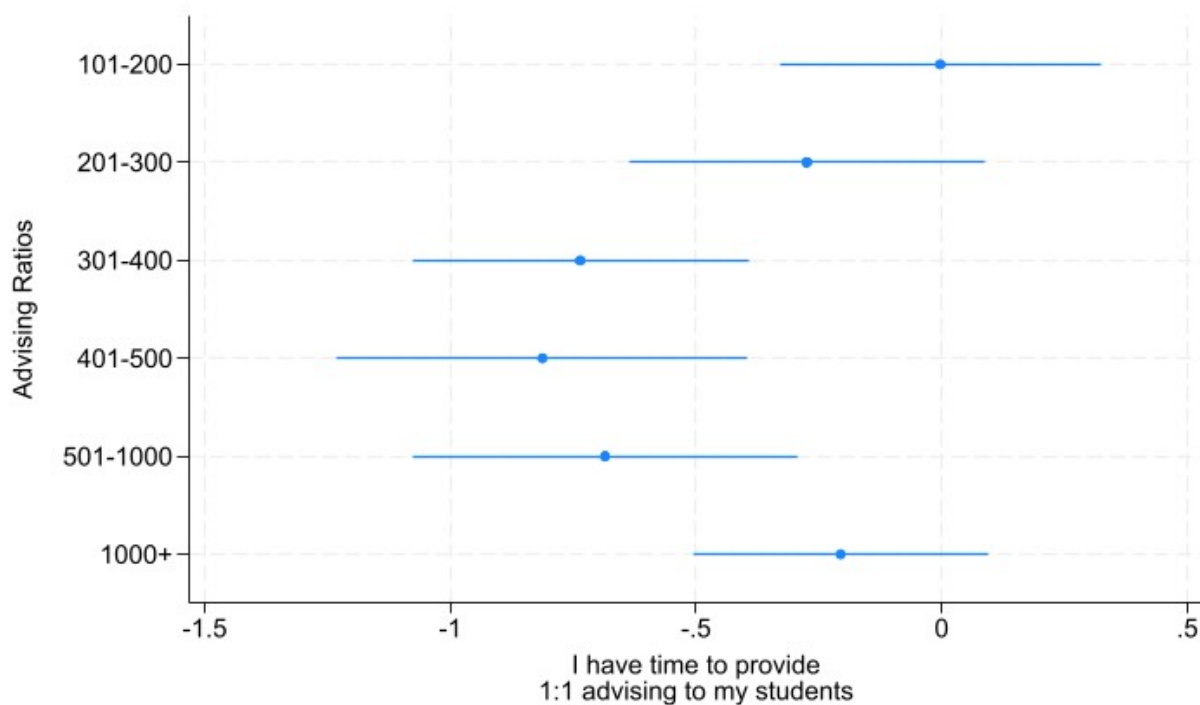
Figure 12: Relationship between Advising Ratios and Time Capacity Index



Given that 1:1 advising is both a strategically important activity for counselors and advisors and the they were least likely to agree that they had time for 1:1 advising, we fit a separate regression

model where the outcome was the survey question regarding whether respondents agreed that they had time for 1:1 advising. We find a similar pattern compared to the previous analysis. There were no statistically significant differences between counselors and advisors with 101-200 or 201-300 student caseloads and the reference group in their agreement with having the time to provide 1:1 advising. However, we find a similar decline in respondents' agreement with this statement as advising loads increase, and counselors and advisors serving between 300-1000 students were significantly less likely to report having the time to provide 1:1 advising. Once again, we also find that counselors and advisors serving more than 1,000 students disrupted this trend. Although they reported less agreement with the statement that they had time for 1:1 advising compared to counselors and advisors serving 1-100 students, this difference was not statistically significant.

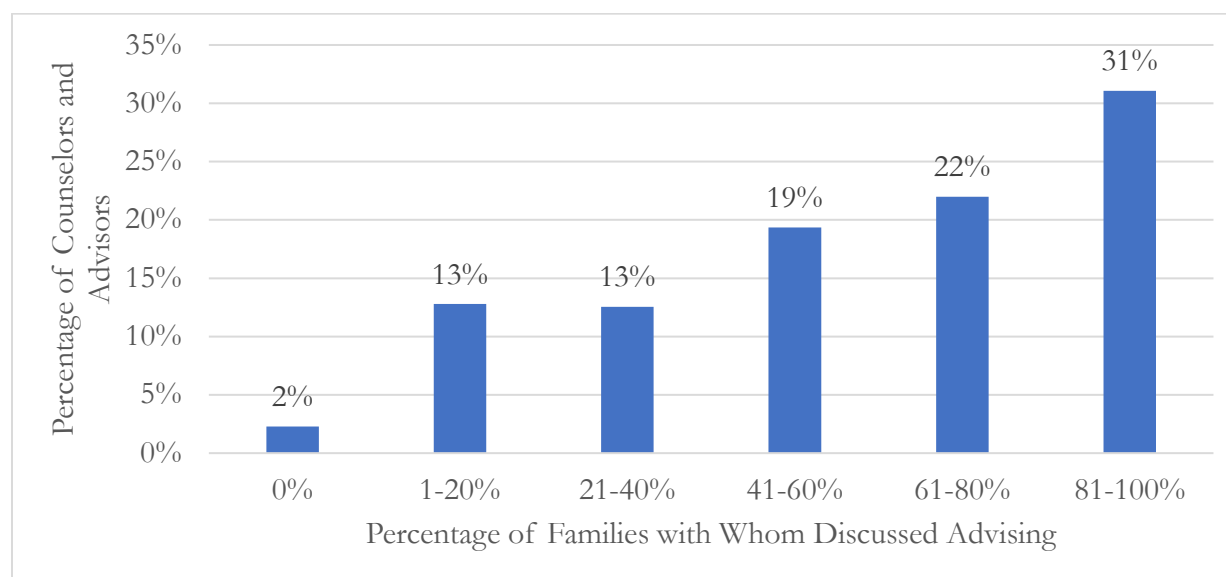
Figure 13: Relationship between Advising Ratios and Time for 1:1 Advising



Finally, while not included in the index of time capacity, we asked counselors and advisors to report the percentage of students' families with whom they had discussed college and career topics,

given that parent and guardian involvement in planning for students' futures is an integral component of effective advising models. Figure 13 visualizes the percentage of respondents who reported having discussing college and/or career with different percentages of families. Although counselors and advisors were most likely to report having met with nearly all of their students' families (81-100%) to discuss advising, less than one-third of respondents selected this response. In contrast, nearly half of respondents (47%) reported having met 60% or less of their students' families to discuss advising.

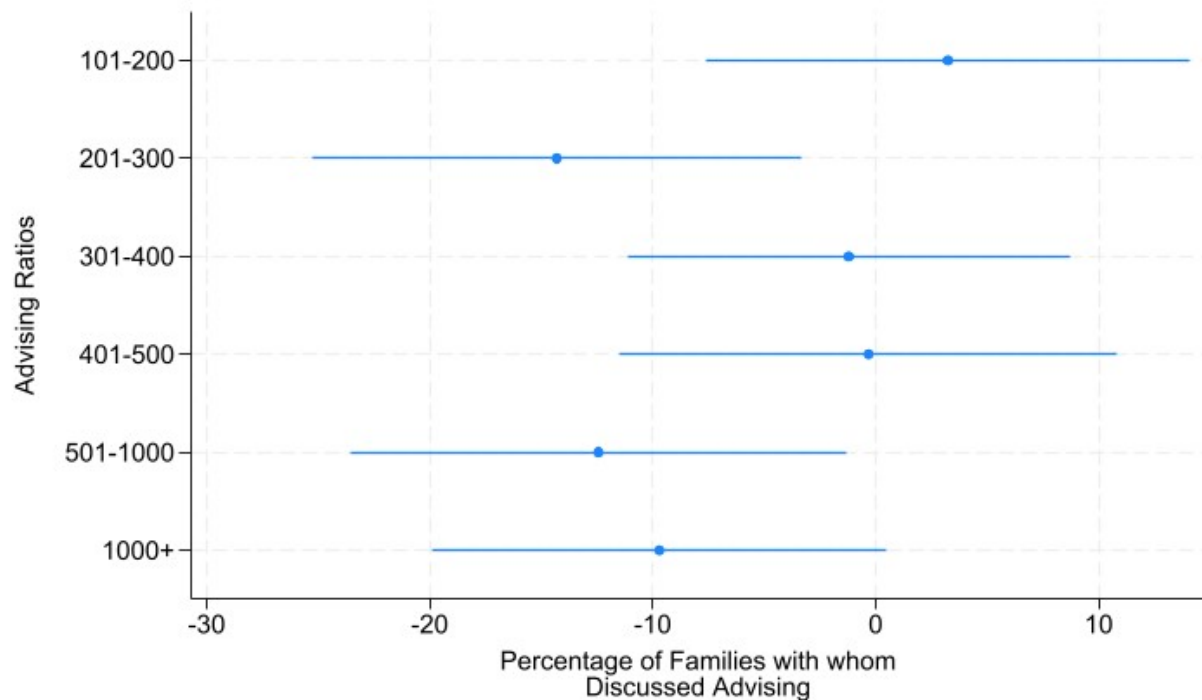
Figure 14: Percentage of Families with whom Counselors and Advisors Discussed Advising



While advising ratios were found to be related to time capacity and 1:1 advising in the previous analyses, the relationship between advising ratios and family involvement in advising is linear, as shown in Figure 14. Because the question asked specifically about college and career advising, we restricted the sample to respondents working in high schools for this analysis. There are no significant differences in the percentage of families with whom counselors and advisors discussed college and career for respondents advising 101-200, 301-400, or 401-500 students compared to those advising 1-100. Curiously, respondents serving 201-300 students did report significantly lower family involvement. Additionally, counselors and advisors serving 501-1000 or more than 1,000

students reported meeting with roughly 10% fewer of their students' families compared to respondents with advising loads of 1-100 students. Overall, while the relationship is less linear, the results suggest that counselors and advisors with high caseloads may have less capacity to involve parents and guardians in college and career planning.

Figure 15: Relationship between Advising Ratios and Family Involvement in Advising for Counselors and Advisors Working in High Schools



Virtual Advising is Widespread, but the Depth of Student Engagement is Unclear

Our discussion of transactional advising capacity thus far has focused on the supply of counselors and advisors in the state, student-to-advisor ratios, and the time counselors and advisors have to provide college and career advising to students. In addition to increasing the supply of personnel dedicated to providing advising to students, states and educational institutions are increasingly relying on digital tools to expand advising capacity. In Texas, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) developed and implemented a tool called ADVi, an AI-

powered chatbot, to bolster the state’s advising capacity.⁴ High school seniors can opt into receiving messages through ADVi when they begin a college application through the ApplyTexas⁵ portal. In addition to the AI-powered chatbot, conversations can be escalated to a human advisor for response.

Table 2 displays data obtained through a public information request to THECB summarizing the scope of ADVi usage for high school seniors across Texas from 2019-20 to 2021-22. *Students contacted* refers to students who opted into receiving messages through ADVi and received at least one message. *Incoming messages* refers to the total number of messages students sent to ADVi. *Actively engaged students* indicates the number of students who sent at least one message to ADVi. *Escalated students* and *escalated messages* count the number of students and messages, respectively, that were escalated to a human advisor for review and/or response. *Advising conversations* indicates the count of conversations where human advisors sent messages to students, and *advisor messages* is the count of those messages sent by advisors.

Table 2: ADVi Data Obtained from THECB

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	Total
Students Contacted	103,317	226,017	247,580	576,914
Incoming Messages	143,022	1,151,709	775,308	2,070,039
Actively Engaged Students	59,174	154,959	157,597	371,730
Escalated Students	2,271	14,960	14,518	31,749
Escalated Messages	3,610	27,110	24,821	55,541
Advising Conversations	1,590	13,777	11,694	27,061
Advisor Messages	2,020	21,556	14,052	37,628

The data in Table 2 highlights both the breadth of usage of virtual advising via ADVi across Texas, as well as the modest engagement between students and human advisors facilitated by the tool. On the former point, the 247,580 students contacted via ADVi in 2021-22 represents nearly

⁴ <https://www.highered.texas.gov/our-work/empowering-our-students/exploring-college-options/advi-virtual-advising-project/>

⁵ <https://www.applytexas.org/>

70% of the roughly 360,000 students who were high school seniors in 2021-22, and an even higher percentage of the students who began at least one college application in ApplyTexas. The data also shows nearly half of the graduating cohort was actively engaged with ADVi as measured by sending at least one message through the tool. However, less than 5% of all students contacted via ADVi ended up engaging in an advising conversation with a human advisor. We are not aware of evidence regarding the effectiveness of ADVi for supporting students' transition into higher education.

Counselors and Advisors Need Greater College and Career Knowledge

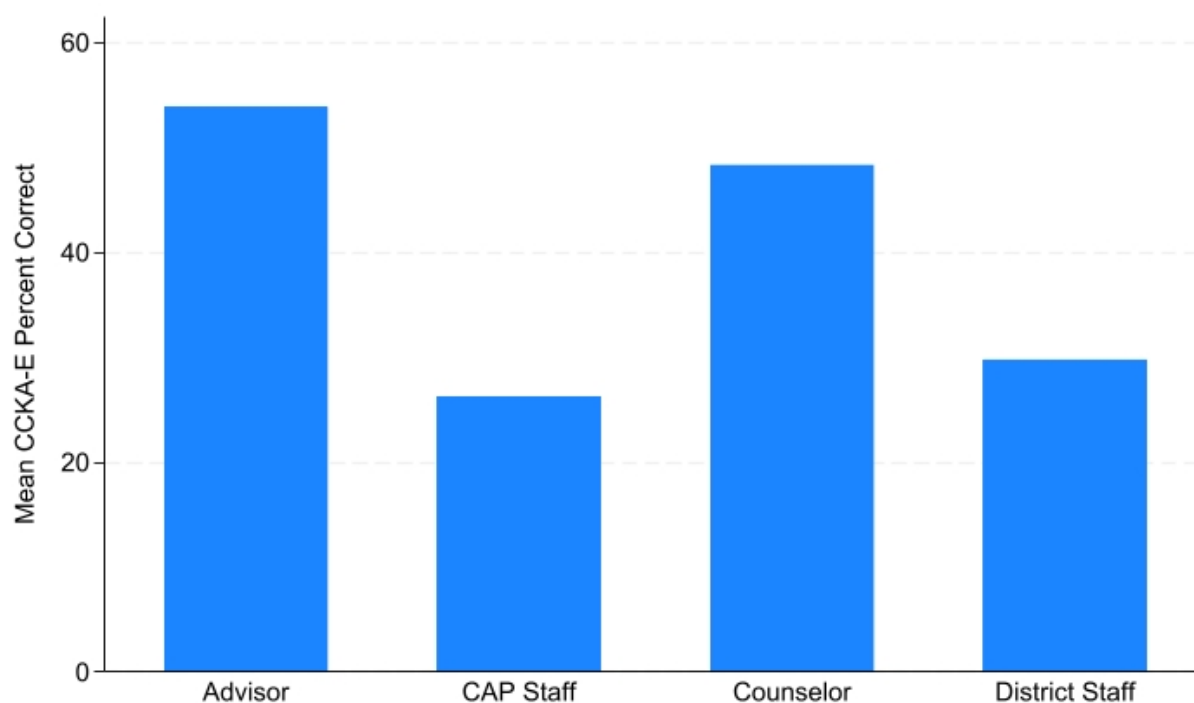
In addition to the mere availability of advising, whether through human counselors and advisors or virtual tools such as ADVi, a key component of the transactional advising framework is that increasing the supply of advising results in students' increased access to reliable information about preparing for college and career. However, limited research has attempted to quantify counselors' and advisors' knowledge of college and career topics. To address this gap, Texas OnCourse developed the College and Career Knowledge Assessment for Educators (CCKA-E), a standardized assessment that contains multiple-choice questions with correct and incorrect answers.⁶ The CCKA-E was administered as an optional module to respondents who completed the Advising Capacity Survey, and $n = 1,049$ respondents (53%) completed the CCKA-E.

Figure 16 displays the mean performance on the CCKA-E by respondents' role. Overall, performance on the CCKA-E was quite low, with respondents answering less than 40% of the questions correct on average (not shown on the figure). However, performance varied significantly across roles. Advisors demonstrated the highest performance on the assessment (54%) with counselors performing only slightly worse (48%). In contrast, both CAP staff (26%) and district-level staff overseeing counseling and advising (30%) performing considerably worse on the assessment compared to student-facing counselors and advisors. Although it is perhaps unsurprising

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=u5tOPOOvT9o>

(and a positive finding) that educators working directly with students have greater knowledge of college and career topics, it is nevertheless concerning that the supervisory staff presumably responsible for overseeing the training and professional development of student-facing counselors and advisors have far less knowledge of college and career topics.

Figure 16: Mean Performance on Texas OnCourse College and Career Knowledge Assessment for Educators, by Role



Summary of Transactional Advising Capacity

The purpose of this chapter of the report was to summarize data on transactional advising capacity in Texas. We conceptualized transactional advising capacity as the supply of counselors and advisors across the state and resulting student-to-advisor ratios, the time counselors and advisors have to provide college and career advising to students, and their knowledge of college and career topics. We also examined the usage of a statewide tool meant to bolster transactional advising capacity, THECB's ADVi digital advising tool. The results suggest that student-to-counselor ratios remain higher than recommended standards, but the supply of advisors may be more extensive than

previously assumed. This likely aids in bolstering advising capacity given that advisors are able to dedicate more than twice as much of their time to college and career advising compared to counselors. Nevertheless, counselors and advisors both report limited time capacity, particularly to provide 1:1 advising to students and to engage with students' families in college and career advising. Given the significant relationships between advising ratios and dimensions of time capacity, reducing ratios further may be a necessary step to ensuring both counselors and advisors have the capacity to fulfill their advising roles. Our results show that the usage of the virtual advising tool ADVi is widespread, as the majority of students in the 2020-21 and 2021-22 graduating classes engaged with ADVi in some form. However, students' connections with human advisors through the tool remains modest. Finally, our results show considerable opportunity to strengthen counselors' and advisors' knowledge of college and career topics in order to ensure students have access to reliable information about pursuing college and career. Although counselors and advisors demonstrated greater knowledge of college and career topics compared to both district and CAP staff, additional training may be needed to ensure counselors and advisors have the requisite knowledge.

Transformational Advising Capacity

The previous chapter examined the availability of advising, which we also refer to as dimensions of *transactional* advising capacity. These dimensions can be understood as necessary but insufficient preconditions to providing students with effective college and career advising. Put differently, advising reforms will likely be ineffective if they do not produce conditions in which students have counselors and/or advisors in school with the roles, responsibilities, and time to dedicate to providing advising. However, simply increasing the supply of counselors and/or advisors, reducing student-to-advisor ratios, and providing counselors and advisors with more time for advising (particularly 1:1 advising) will not necessarily lead to improvements in students' college and career outcomes.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore three additional dimensions of advising capacity that are often overlooked, insufficiently theorized, and inadequately measured in research on counseling and advising: 1) *navigational capacity*; 2) *sociocultural capacity*; 3) *motivational capacity*. Collectively, we refer to these three components as dimensions of *transformational advising capacity*, as they center transformation in advising systems, school culture, and students motivations that may be necessary to make dramatic improvements in students' college and career outcomes. Before presenting our results examining these dimensions of advising capacity, we offer definitions of each:

- *Navigational capacity* – The capacity of advisors to navigate the systems, processes, and relationships both within and outside of schools in order to connect students to the resources and supports needed to promote their college and career outcomes. Although navigational capacity may be important for all educators within a school, we define navigational capacity in this study as specific to college advisors given their unique role as non-school employees working within school contexts.

- *Sociocultural capacity* – The capacity of counselors and advisors to understand the sociocultural backgrounds of their students and attune their advising to students’ sociocultural backgrounds. By sociocultural backgrounds, we primarily focus on students’ racial/ethnic identities and socioeconomic backgrounds given the importance of these aspects of students’ identities in shaping their college and career trajectories. We recognize that many other aspects of students’ backgrounds and identities (e.g. immigration and citizenship status, gender identity, sexual orientation, languages spoken at home, religious background) are critical to examine and encourage future research on broader conceptualizations of sociocultural capacity.
- *Motivational capacity* – The capacity of counselors and advisors to motivate students to take steps needed to prepare for and successfully transition into college and career. We theorize that higher motivational capacity among counselors and advisors would lead to higher levels of motivation, aspirations, and self-efficacy in college-going among students.

Although all three of these dimensions of advising capacity have been proposed in some form, they have been insufficiently theorized and measured. The sections below present findings from both the Advising Capacity Survey and interviews with current and former advisors that elucidated these themes.

Navigational Capacity: A Critical Skill for College Advisors

For many advisors, working with students on preparing for college and career did not pose as great a challenge as navigating the systems, institutions, and interpersonal relationships needed to provide effective and holistic advising to students. Advisors typically work in schools where school counselors are often primarily responsible for developing and implementing comprehensive advising systems, requiring advisors to coordinate effectively with counselors. Many schools and districts also partner with multiple CAP vendors simultaneously, requiring advisors to navigate relationships with

personnel from other advising programs.

This is particularly challenging for

advisors who are recent college graduates

and have limited professional experience,

both generally and specifically in school

settings. The challenges navigating these

systems and relationships was a recurring

theme in our interviews with current and

former advisors, as illustrated in the excerpt in the call-out box.

I think one of the biggest things was just like, the people who had been to the school a long time, who felt like things should just continue the way that they were, they weren't necessarily willing to innovate... Those kinds of very rigid mindsets made it challenging to navigate those situations. I think that that also ended up teaching me how to like, stick up for myself and my ideas.

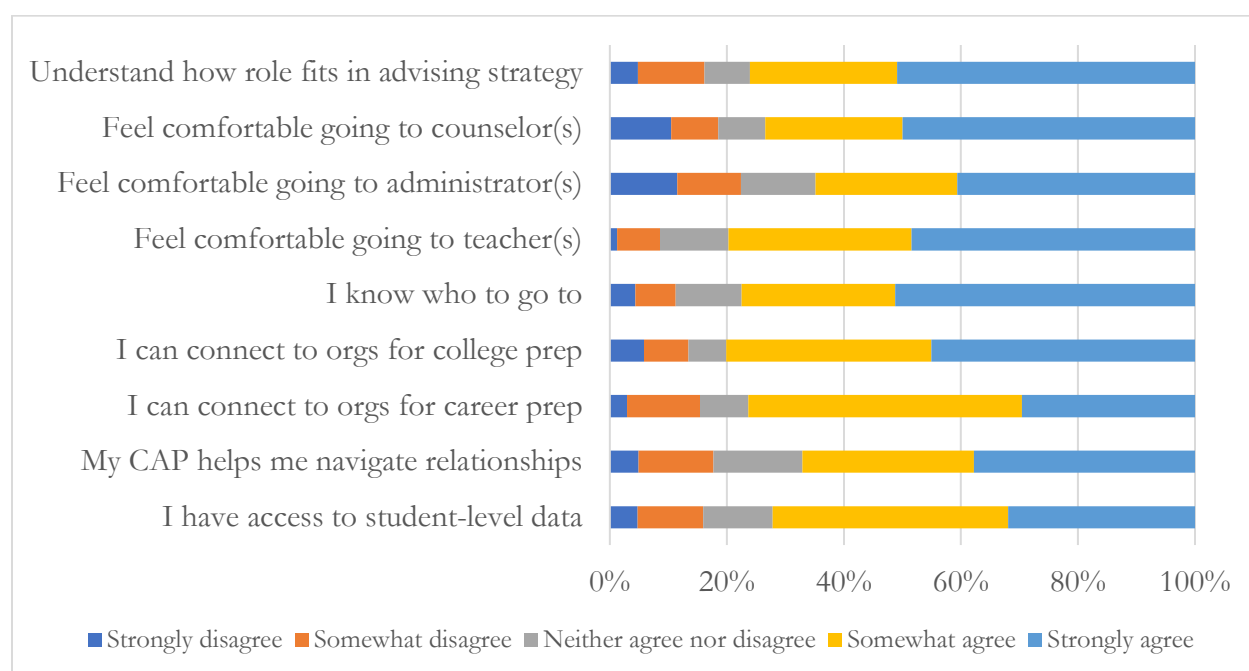
- Former College Advisor

To gauge advisors' perceptions of their *navigational capacity*, we asked them a set of questions about their relationships with other educators at their school, how they navigate those relationships, and whether they understood how their role fit within their school's advising strategy. Because these questions were specific to advisors, they were the only group of respondents asked these questions. The results are presented in Figure 6. On the positive side, advisors were more likely to agree than disagree with many of these statements. For example, roughly half of advisors strongly agreed that they understood how their role fits in the school's advising strategy and that they feel comfortable going to counselors, teachers, and (to a lesser extent) administrators for assistance with providing advising to students. More than 60% of advisors somewhat or strongly agreed with all of the statements. In contrast, fewer than 20% of advisors somewhat or strongly disagreed with all of the navigational capacity statements, with the one exception being the question asking advisors about their comfort going to their administrators for support.

Nevertheless, there is opportunity for growth. Roughly one-third of respondents did not somewhat or strongly agree (i.e. chose one of the three negative or ambivalent response options) that their CAP helps them navigate the relationships in their school. And while it is true that

advisors were more likely to agree than disagree with the statements, it is also true that only about half of advisors strongly agreed with statements about their comfort collaborating with other educators in their school. It is reasonable to expect that all advisors should feel comfortable going to counselors, teachers, and administrators at their school to support their advising efforts, yet roughly half of respondents did not strongly agree with these statements.

Figure 17: Advisors' Perceptions of Navigational Capacity



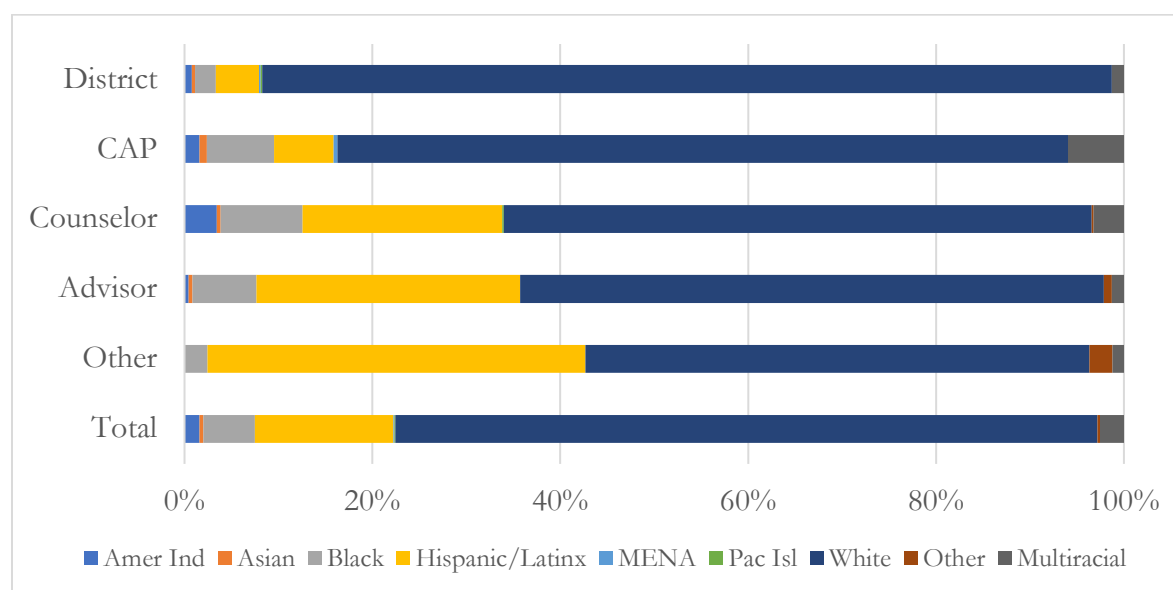
Sociocultural Capacity: An Urgent Need Given the Misalignment between the Demographics of Educators and the Students the Serve

In order to effectively support students in their preparations for and transitions into college and career, counselors and advisors must understand students' sociocultural backgrounds. For example, the importance of academic match vs. cultural fit in choosing a college may be particularly salient for students from historically marginalized racial/ethnic groups; low-SES students face distinct economic pressures and cost-benefit calculations compared to high-SES students when considering postsecondary options; undocumented students have to contend with a contentious and rapidly shifting policy environment that shapes college financing, affordability, residency status, and

the like. A “one-strategy-fits-all” approach is unlikely to producing effective advising for students, and historically marginalized or underrepresented students are least likely to receive the socioculturally attuned advising they need and deserve.

Before presenting our results related to counselors’ and advisors’ perceptions of their sociocultural capacity, we would be remiss not to highlight the disconnect between the demographic characteristics of the advising force and the populations of students they serve. Figure 16 presents the distribution of racial/ethnic identities among educators who responded to the Advising Capacity Survey. We remind the reader that the sample is not necessarily representative of the full population of educators working in advising in the state, but we believe it is a reasonable approximation given the diversity of respondents from across the state. As shown in the figure, the majority of all educators in advising roles in Texas are white, and administrators are even whiter than student-facing counselors and advisors. Roughly 90% of district-level personnel responsible for counseling and advising, 78% of CAP staff, 63% of school counselors, and 62% of advisors are white. In contrast, only 5% of district-level personnel, 6% of CAP staff, 21% of counselors, and 28% of advisors are Hispanic/Latinx, despite Texas public schools being majority Hispanic/Latinx. Only 2% of district-level personnel are Black while 7-9% of CAP staff, counselors, and advisors are Black. There were very few American Indian/Native American, Asian, Middle Eastern/North African, or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander respondents to the survey.

Figure 18: Racial/Ethnic Identities of Advising Capacity Survey Respondents



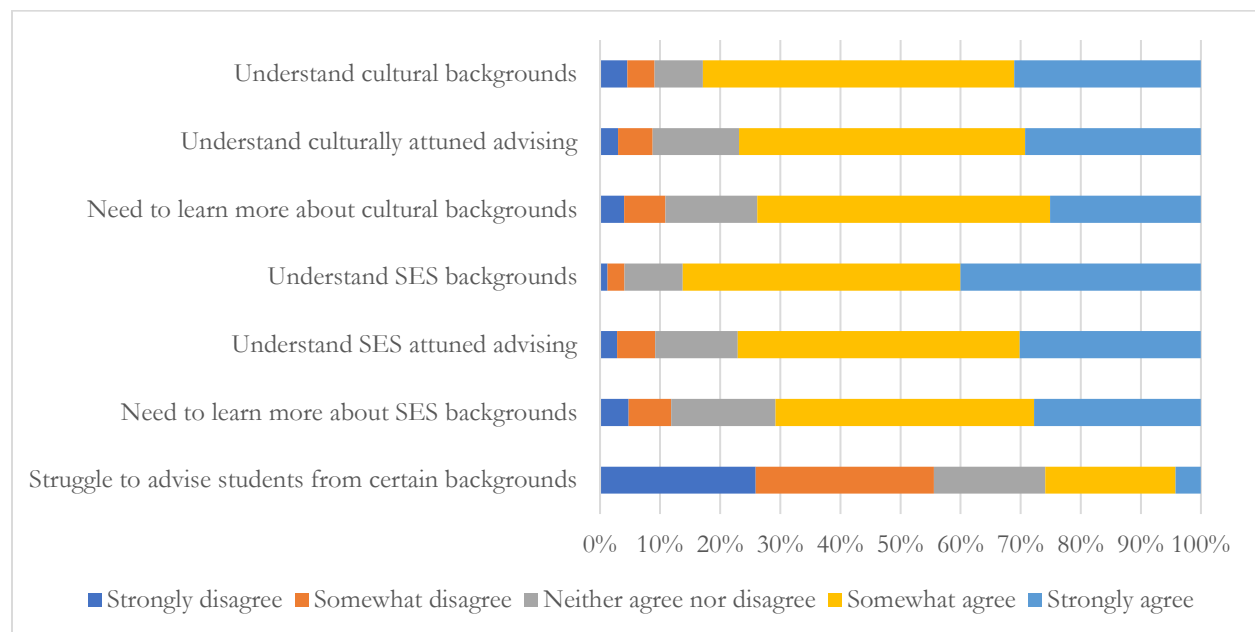
It is equally important to underscore that demographic congruence between students and the educators who advise them may be an important but insufficient precondition to socioculturally attuned advising. As eloquently described in the following excerpt, even advisors who come from the same communities as the students they serve or have similar demographic backgrounds may not fully grasp the intricate and complex sociocultural contexts in which students are living until they begin the work. As also illustrated in the excerpt, becoming familiar with students' sociocultural backgrounds is an inescapable and critical component of effective college and career advising.

I worked with students whose families made less than \$5,000 a year. I had lived in Brownsville my entire life and had been surrounded by poverty, but it was a level of poverty I didn't understand. When you work in this space, you see the most intimate parts of people's lives, and you see an entire population in a brand new way. You see their financial lives, you see their deepest, darkest secrets through those essays. You see their goals, their values, their vision, their hopes and dreams, the situation and their families, the dynamics, the decision-making, and you see who they actually are versus who they portray themselves to be in the world.

- Former College Advisor

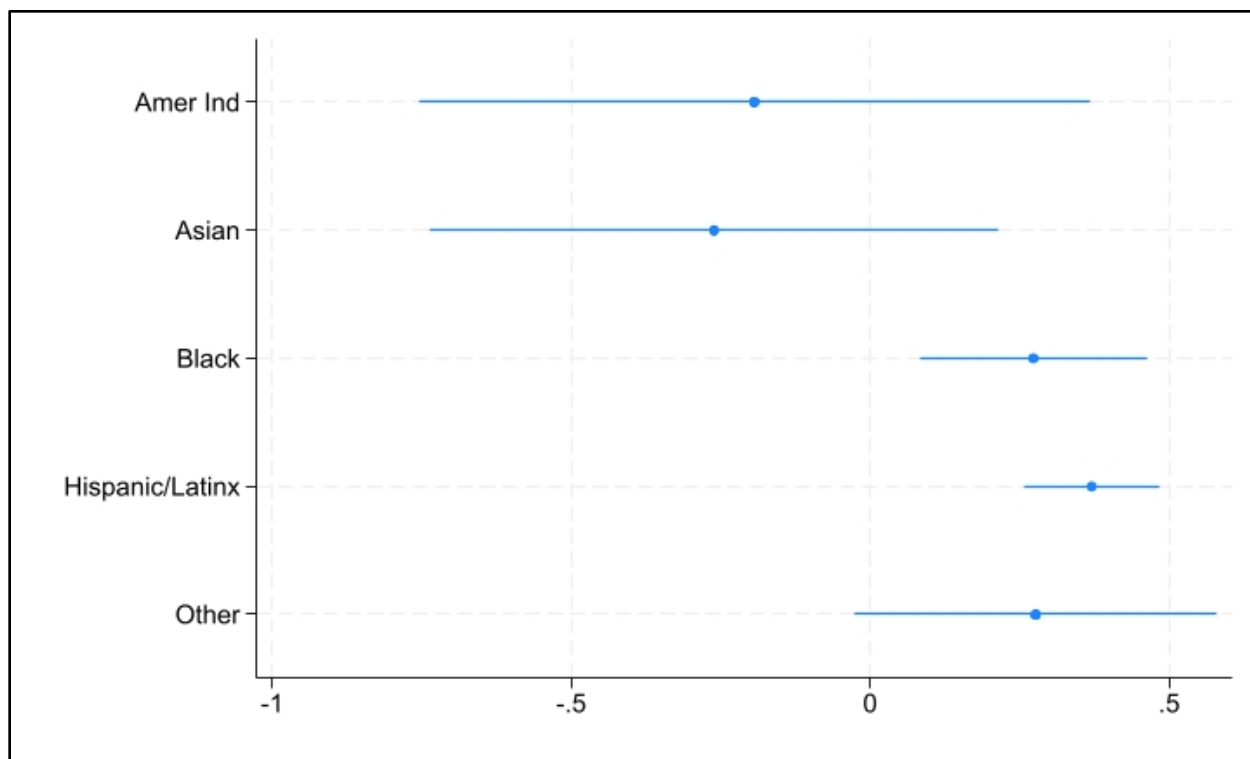
To explore counselors' and advisors' perceptions of sociocultural capacity further, the Advising Capacity Survey asked respondents a series of questions about this dimension of advising capacity. The results are presented in Figure 17. It is important to note that the questions vary in terms of how the response categories relate to sociocultural capacity. For example, for the first two questions, agreement is related to higher sociocultural capacity. In contrast, for the second question, agreement is related to lower sociocultural capacity (i.e. respondents who believe they need to learn more about students' cultural backgrounds have lower sociocultural capacity). Overall, roughly 30-40% of respondents strongly agreed that they understand students' cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, with slightly higher agreement for socioeconomic backgrounds compared to cultural backgrounds. However, a very similar proportion of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they needed to learn more about students' cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Roughly three-quarters of counselors and advisors somewhat or strongly agreed that they needed to learn more about students' cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Roughly three-quarters of counselors and advisors somewhat or strongly agreed that they needed to learn more about students' cultural backgrounds and 70% agreed they needed to learn more about students' socioeconomic backgrounds.

Figure 19: Advisors' Perceptions of Sociocultural Capacity



It is reasonable to assume that counselors' and advisors' responses may have been influenced by social desirability bias. Given the centrality of diversity, equity, and inclusion in many educational reform efforts, admitting that they do not understand students' cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds may have been viewed as a faux pas for many respondents. We therefore asked one question worded slightly differently to examine whether the phrasing of the question would reveal different patterns in respondents' perceptions of their sociocultural capacity. The final question in Figure 17 asked respondents whether they struggle to advise students from particular cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds. Although respondents were still more likely to respond in favor of having greater sociocultural capacity (i.e. to disagree with the statement), the response patterns were indeed different. While 75-85% of respondents agreed with the positive statements about understanding students' cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, only 55% of respondents somewhat or strongly disagreed that they struggle to advise students from particular backgrounds, and only 26% of respondents strongly disagreed. Put differently, roughly three-quarters of respondents were at least somewhat ambivalent about their struggles advising students of different sociocultural backgrounds.

Figure 20: Counselor/Advisor Race and Sociocultural Capacity



We conclude this section with a note about the sociopolitical context in Texas that shaped our approach to measuring sociocultural capacity. Over the past few years, the Texas Legislature has passed a series of bills outlawing the teaching of critical race theory in K-12 schools, training and professional development for K-12 educators related to race and racism, and diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and offices in public higher education. In brief, the political climate in the state is increasingly hostile towards explicitly attending to issues of race/ethnicity in education. Given the sensitivity of this topic, the questions measuring sociocultural capacity were broad and open for interpretation by design. For example, we did not ask respondents whether they struggled to advise Black, Hispanic/Latinx, or low-income students specifically, or whether they needed to learn more about the sociocultural backgrounds of specific student populations.

Motivational Capacity: The Most Critical and Challenging Task for Many Advisors

The final dimension of transformational advising discussed in this chapter is that of motivational capacity. Both the results from the Advising Capacity Survey and our interviews with current and former advisors surfaced two themes related to motivational capacity. First, motivating students to prepare for and transition into college and/or career is a critical component of what many counselors and advisors view as their role.

Some of my kids at the bottom, like the bottom fifth percentile... it might be so easy to have this thought that they are not capable or that they don't want to go to school. And I find that that is just the opposite. That is one of my favorite populations to work with because they are so capable. A lot of these kids will tell me, "You were the only person who helped me. Nobody knows how to help me. Nobody has time to help me. Nobody has the patience to help me. You were the only one."

- Former College Advisor

Nearly half of counselors and advisors strongly agreed with this statement and another 37% somewhat agreed, as shown in the first bar of Figure 18. This is particularly true for lower-achieving students or those not commonly believed to be “college-bound,” as described in the above vignette.

Despite the importance of counselors’ and advisors’ ability to motivate students to prepare for college and career, this is also the dimension of advising capacity that respondents often reported to be the most challenging. The excerpt on the following page from a former advisor is indicative of a recurring theme in many of the interviews; those providing advising often saw even greater potential in students than the educational outcomes students experienced, yet they were unsure what they needed to do to help students make successful transitions into postsecondary education. Indeed, advisors often mentioned the difficulty in motivating students transition into higher

I feel like my biggest challenge is when you see the potential in a student and you think you know what's best for the student, but the student doesn't see that for themselves. For example, a student that's really high performing and is maybe choosing not to enroll in a post-secondary institution and you know that they have a great opportunity, they have the financial aid, and they aren't taking advantage of it and you don't want them to regret it later. Or if you see students that you know are undermatching or just deciding not to do anything when you know that they have options. So I think that's the hardest.

- Former College Advisor

education when asked about the greatest challenges they face in their role as a college and/or career advisor. This challenge was evident in advisors' work with both lower-achieving and high-achieving students.

The results from the Advising Capacity Survey similarly support both the importance of counselors' and advisors' role in motivating students and the difficulties in doing so.

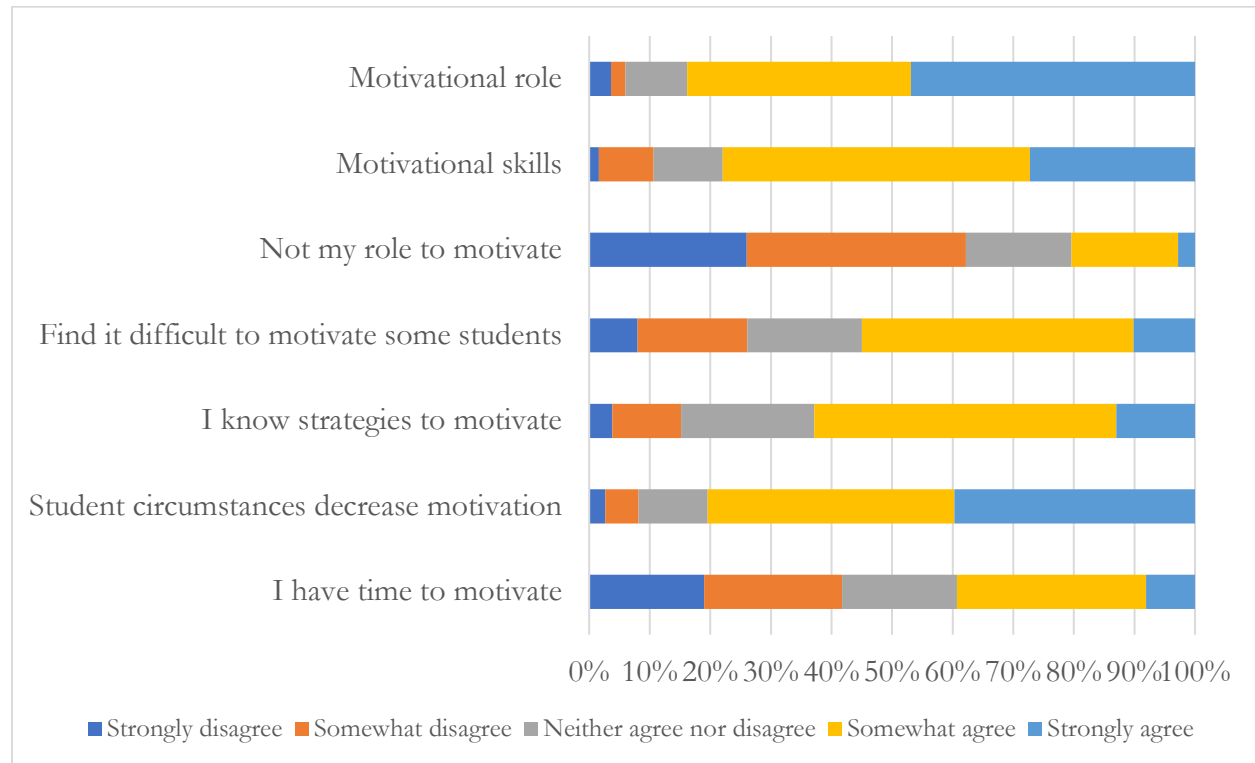
Responses to questions related to motivational capacity are shown in

Figure 18. Once again, we asked questions about respondents' perceptions of their capacity in multiple ways in order to counteract social desirability bias and produce a more accurate and nuanced understanding of motivational capacity.

On a positive note, roughly 80% of respondents somewhat or strongly agreed that it is their role to motivate students to prepare for college and career and they have the skills to do so. However, responses to the remaining questions qualify those beliefs in four important ways. First, while nearly half of respondents strongly agreed with the positively-worded statement that it is their role to motivate students, only about a quarter of respondents strongly disagreed when the question was worded inversely (i.e. "It is not my role..."). In contrast, roughly 20% of respondents somewhat or strongly agreed with the negatively worded statement while only about 5% disagreed with the positively worded statement. Put differently, when the question is worded in a way that invites

respondents to consider that it is not their role to motivate students, counselors and advisors are more inclined to place the onus on others (e.g. students, families).

Figure 21: Advisors' Perceptions of Motivational Capacity



Second, although respondents tended to agree that they had the skills and knew the strategies needed to motivate students, they simultaneously reported that they found it difficult to motivate *at least some* students. While only 10% of respondents strongly agreed with that statement, an additional 45% somewhat agreed that they found it difficult to motivate some students, and fewer than 10% strongly disagreed. These results suggest that counselors and advisors may be inclined to believe they have the skills and strategies they need to motivate students but still find it difficult to do so.

Third, the vast majority of respondents (~80%) somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement that students' circumstances decrease their motivation. While it is true that many students face a variety of personal, familial, and socioeconomic challenges that research has shown decreases

the likelihood that students will enroll in college after high school, one may reasonably question whether these circumstances necessarily result in students being less motivated to pursue higher education. Indeed, the majority of students from all racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds aspire to earn a bachelor's degree or higher. If counselors and advisors believe that students' circumstances are the cause of decreases in their motivation and, by definition, students' circumstances are outside of the direct control of counselors and advisors, it is easy to see how counselors and advisors may view the task of motivating students as outside of their purview or possibility. We speculate that this could lead some counselors and advisors to dedicate less time or effort to students who they have deemed to be unmotivated to pursue higher education given their personal circumstances.

However, the fourth and final point is equally critical; a minority of counselors and advisors reported that they have the time to motivate students to prepare for college and career. Fewer than 10% of respondents agreed with this statement, whereas nearly 20% strongly disagreed. This finding may help us to reconcile the potential contradiction between the findings that counselors and advisors report that they have the skills and strategies needed to motivate students but still find it difficult to do so – the skills and strategies alone may be insufficient if counselors and advisors do not also have the time they need to motivate students.

Summary of The Transformational Dimensions of Advising Capacity

The purpose of this chapter was to highlight that the capacity of counselors and advisors to support students in pursuing and attaining their educational aspirations is not solely determined by the transactional dimensions of advising capacity such as the presence of counselors and advisors in schools, student-to-advisor ratios, and the time counselors and advisors allocate to advising activities. At its core, advising is a relational activity built on trust, empathy, and understanding established between advisors and the students they serve. The results from this chapter show that

navigational capacity, *sociocultural capacity*, and *motivational capacity* are three key dimensions of transformational advising that are important to consider in efforts to prepare counselors and advisors for this work. These dimensions are important both conceptually and because the findings show that counselors and advisors report a desire and need to bolster their sociocultural and motivational capacity.

We should also underscore that these dimensions of advising capacity are critical in regards to the potential for advising efforts to promote equity in students college and career outcomes, but for different reasons. As discussed above, sociocultural capacity is critical particularly due to the misalignment between the demographic characteristics of our student population – which is majority low-income and students of color – and the demographics of our advising labor force – which is largely white and, by law, in possession of at least a bachelor’s degree and often a master’s degree (particularly for professional school counselors). Although demographic congruence between students and counselors or advisors does not automatically equate to socioculturally attuned advising, bolstering counselors’ and advisors’ sociocultural capacity is particularly critical given their demographic makeup.

Motivational capacity may also enhance equity in student outcomes, but in this case particularly for students who are less motivated to attend college or are faced with personal circumstances that create obstacles for realizing their postsecondary aspirations. Put simply, students who are already highly motivated to attend college may require less support and encouragement from their counselors and advisors, whereas motivational capacity of counselors and advisors may be particularly transformative for students who do not see themselves as college students or perceive the obstacles to enrolling and succeeding in college as insurmountable.

Finally, while we often think of the work of advising as being centered on the individual relationships between students and their counselors and advisors, the results from the previous

chapter highlighted that the majority of schools are comprised of multiple advisors and/or CAPs in addition to the school counselors and other educators working in the school. Our results suggest that navigational capacity is an important element in the work of advisors, particularly given their role as “outsiders” to the formal school system and their need to effectively integrate into school systems and collaborate with other personnel and programs in the school. Providing advisors with the training, mentorship, and supports they need to navigate these systems and relationships is a promising strategy for bolstering advising capacity.

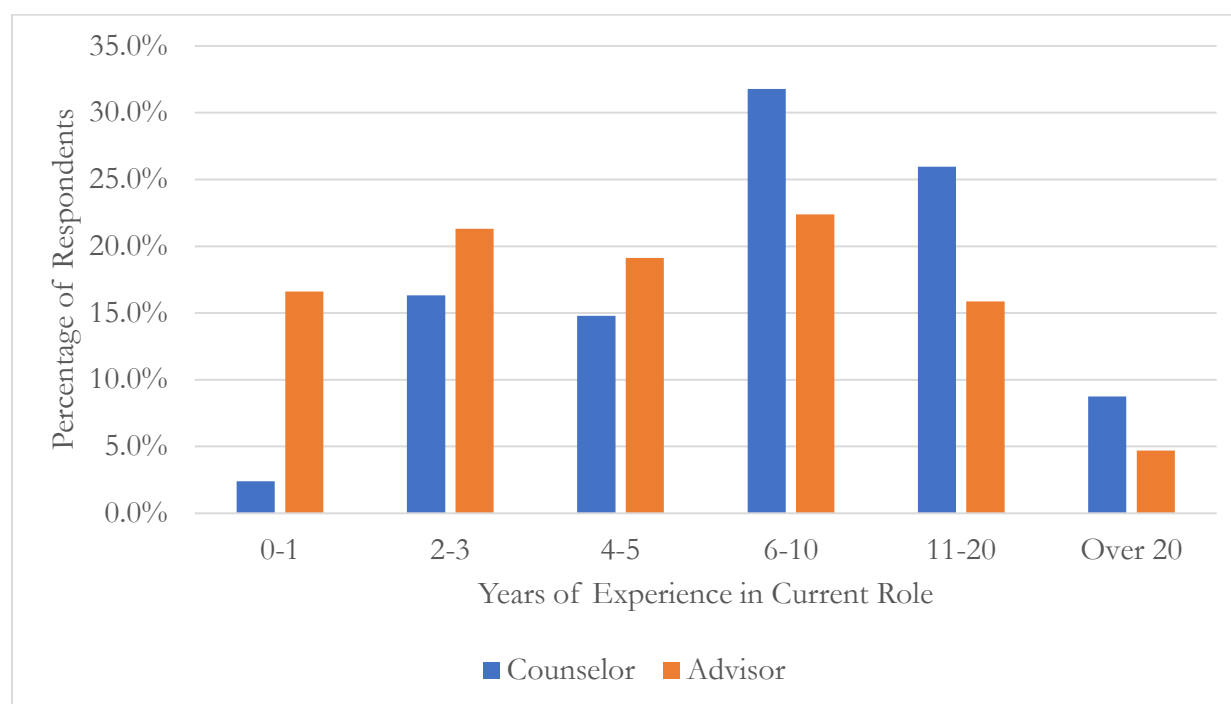
Professionalization and Advising Capacity

If we believe in the benefits of advisors developing their *navigational capacity*, *sociocultural capacity*, and *motivational capacity* in order to provide transformational advising, the question naturally follows: How can we support advisors' development of these transformational advising capacities? This section of the report examines components of what we refer to as the professionalization of the advising profession. Whereas professions such as professional school counselors are restricted to those who have taught for multiple years in schools, earned a graduate degree, and obtained professional licensure, the college advising profession is far less regulated. Limiting barriers to entry into the profession has benefits – advisors can be recruited directly out of college, regardless of their major or prior experience, and advisor pay can be lower than the salaries of counselors and other certified or licensed educators. Nevertheless, our results point to an overall lack of professionalization of college advisors that may limit the ability of advisors to develop the capacities needed for transformational advising.

Advisors Tend to Have Limited Professional Experience

Figure 21 shows the distribution of self-reported years of experience in one's current position for counselors and advisors who responded to the Advising Capacity Survey. Overall, advisors have far less professional experience in their current position compared to counselors who, by law, would also have at least two years of full-time teaching experience before becoming a counselor in addition to the years of experience working as a counselor that they would have indicated in response to this survey question. Roughly one-in-six advisors in Texas have one year of experience or less, and nearly half (48%) have worked as an advisor for four or fewer years. In contrast, nearly two-thirds of counselors have at least six years of experience, and counselors are almost twice as likely as advisors to have over 20 years of experience.

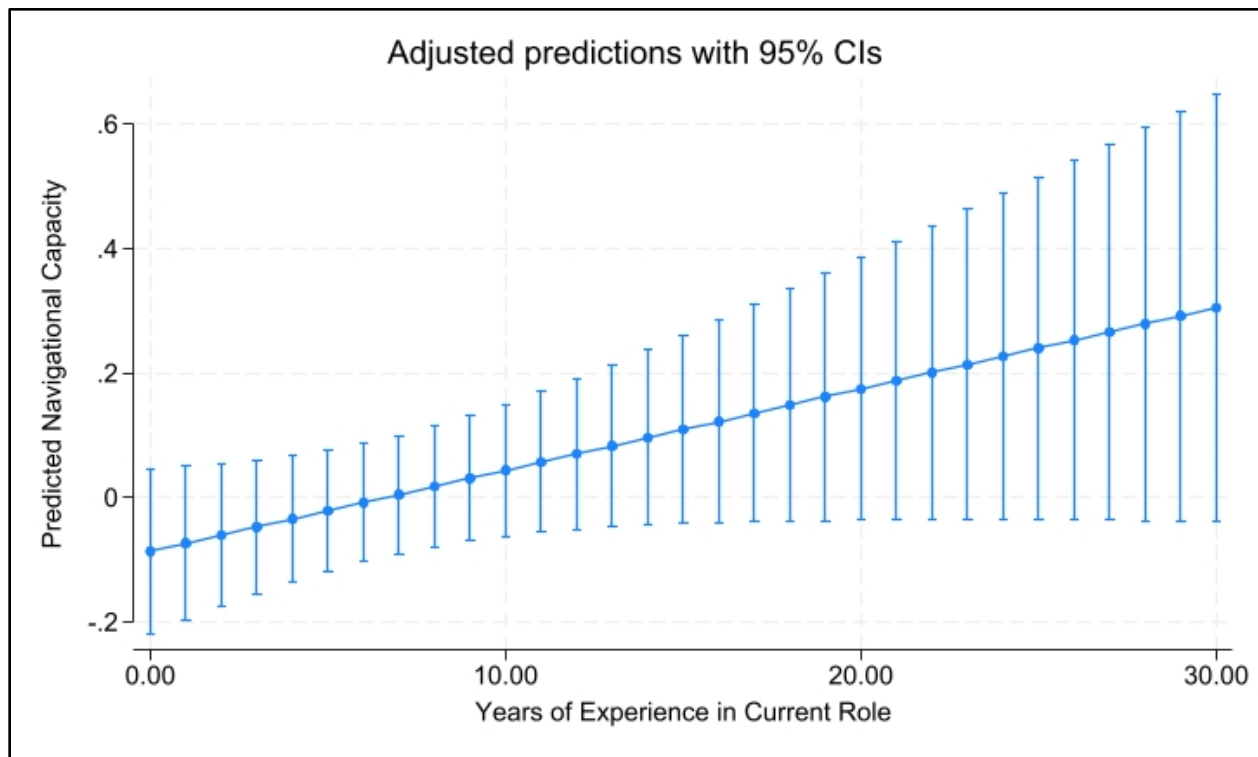
Figure 22: Years of Experience in Current Role for Counselors and Advisors



Experience Matters for Many (but not all) Dimensions of Advising Capacity

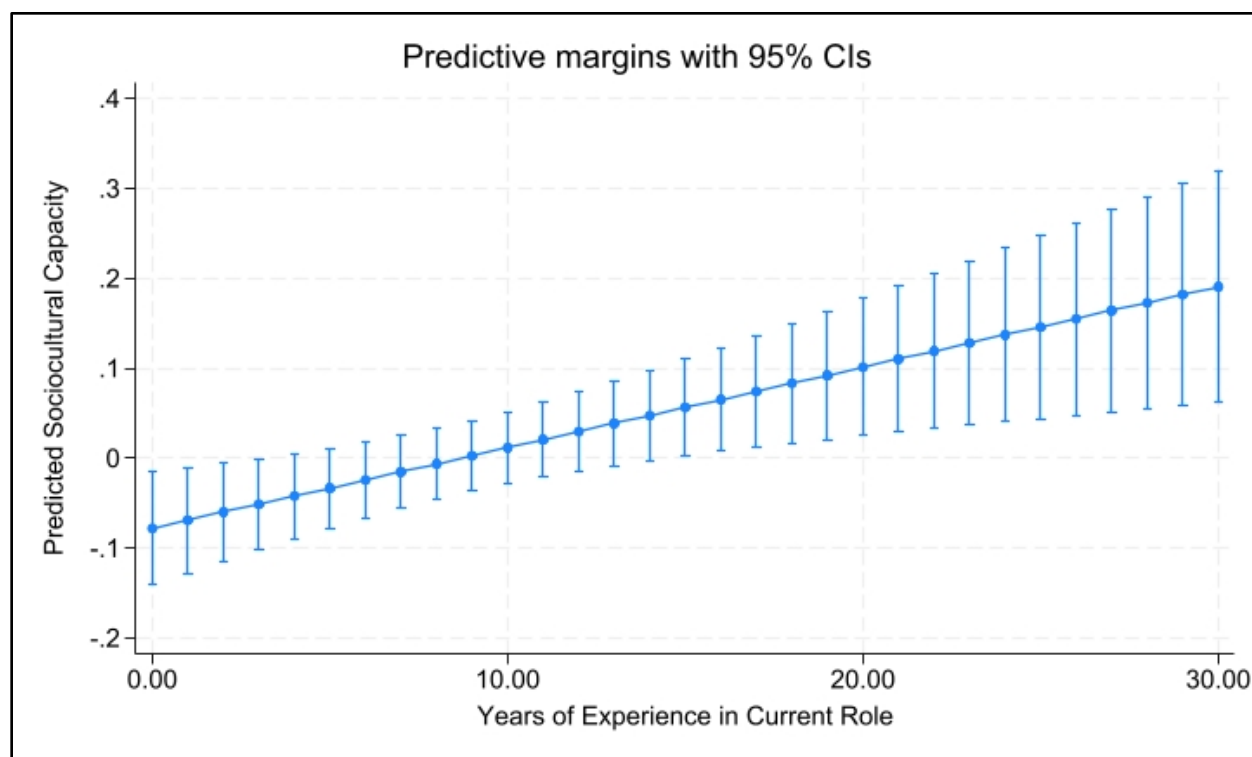
One may ask the extent to which advisor experience matters. Indeed, one of the most common models of advising is the near-peer model, where recent college graduates serve as an advisor in a high school similar to the one from which they graduated. The logic of this approach is that near-peer advisors may be able to form deeper relationships with high school students precisely because they are young and do not yet have years of professional experience. Nevertheless, this approach is not without risks. As shown in Figure 22, which visualizes the estimated relationship between experience and navigational capacity from a linear regression model, advisors are estimated to gain navigational capacity as they gain years of experience. This finding is aligned with what we would hypothesize – although training and professional development can provide advisors with some knowledge and skills useful to their role, understanding how to navigate the processes, systems, and relationships needed to provide effective advising is difficult to acquire through pre-service training.

Figure 23: Predicted Navigational Capacity for Advisors, by Years of Experience



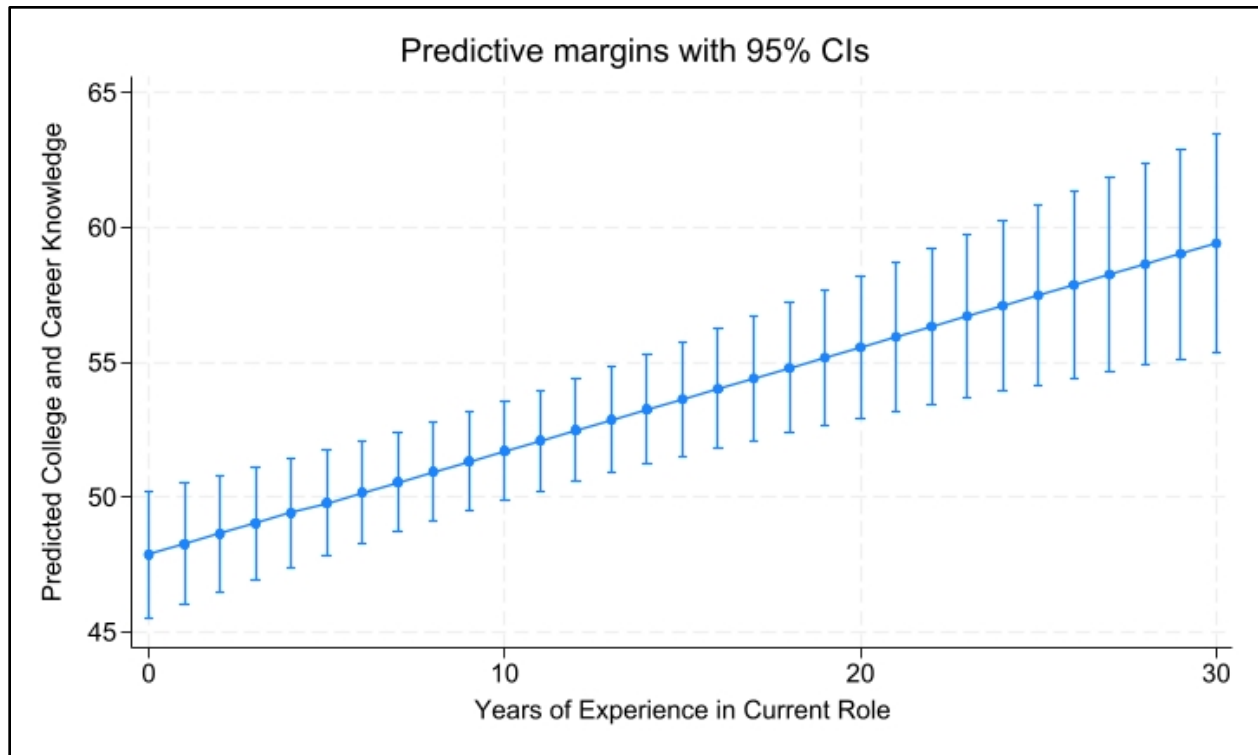
We similarly find that sociocultural capacity increases with years of experience, once again using a linear regression model regression sociocultural capacity on experience and also controlling for respondents' race/ethnicity, given our previous finding that race/ethnicity relates to sociocultural capacity. In this case, the sample includes both counselors and advisors, as both responded to the questions about sociocultural capacity (navigational capacity questions were exclusively asked of advisors). As shown in Figure 23, the results suggest a significant linear relationship between experience and sociocultural capacity. Once again, while pre-service training may allow counselors and advisors to gain some understanding of the sociocultural backgrounds and contexts of the populations of students they serve, experience is still an important factor in the development of counselors' and advisors' sociocultural capacity.

Figure 24: Predicted Sociocultural Capacity for Counselors and Advisors, by Years of Experience



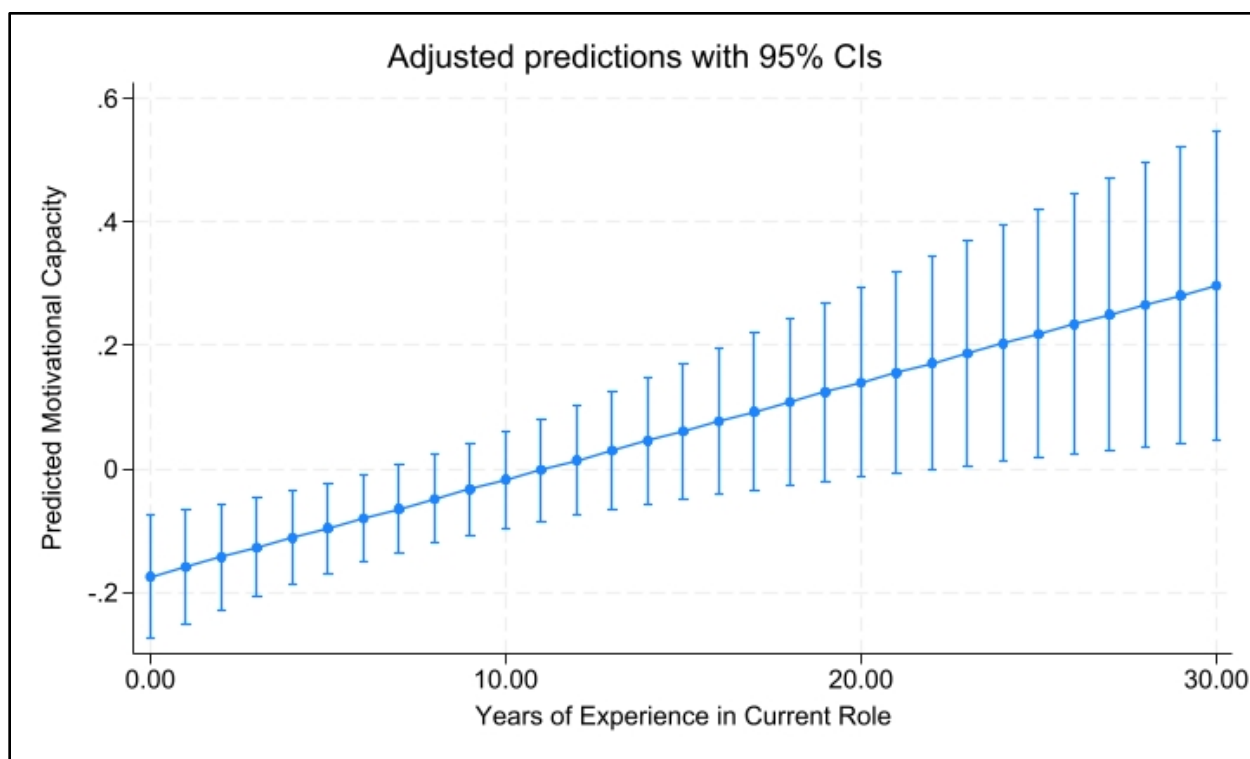
Even if training and professional development is more effective at providing counselors and advisors with more transactional college and career knowledge compared to relational dimensions of advising capacity, we still find that experience is important for the development of college and career knowledge. As shown in Figure 24, we also find that college and career knowledge significantly improves as counselors and advisors gain more experience. In this linear regression model, the outcome is respondents' scores on Texas OnCourse's College and Career Knowledge Assessment for Educators (CCKA-E), which is a multiple-choice assessment of counselors' and advisors' knowledge of various topics related to postsecondary advising, career advising, and financial aid. This finding is important because CCKA-E scores are not simply self-reported measures. A valid and reliable instrument designed to measure college and career knowledge also demonstrates the importance of professional experience for the development of advising capacity.

Figure 25: Predicted College and Career Knowledge for Counselors and Advisors, by Years of Experience



But there is one dimension of advising capacity where the relationship between years of experience and advising capacity is more nuanced: motivational capacity. For this dimension, we find no relationship between years of experience and motivational capacity when the sample is both counselors and advisors, nor when the sample is just counselors. However, when we restrict the sample to just advisors, we do once again find that professional experience is significantly related to this dimension of advising capacity, as shown in Figure 25. It is unclear why experience may matter more for advisors compared to counselors for motivational capacity. Perhaps counselors gain motivational capacity while working as a teacher, but additional years of experience as a counselor brings no further improvements to motivational capacity. Nevertheless, the results underscore that professional experience is critical for the development of counselors and – in particular – advisors’ various dimensions of advising capacity.

Figure 26: Predicted Motivational Capacity for Advisors, by Years of Experience



Paying Advisors Like Educational Professionals

Given the importance of experience for the development of advising capacities, a key question is how we can effectively retain advisors given that nearly half of all advisors in the state who responded to the Advising Capacity Survey had worked as an

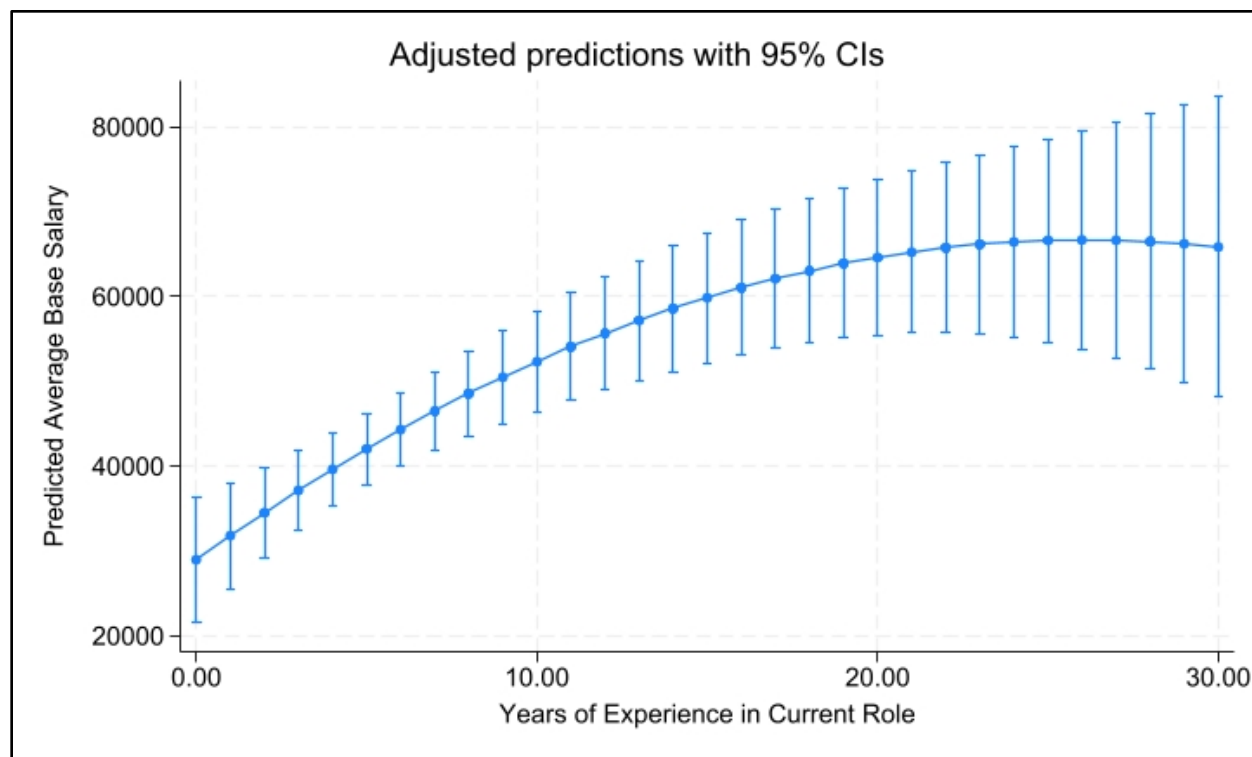
“Why is the lowest paid person in the building the one primarily responsible for ensuring kids go to college?”

- David Johnston, Executive Director of College, Career, & Military Readiness, Houston Independent School District

advisor for four years or less. Although the causes of advisors’ departure from the profession are surely numerous, one factor seems particular influential: salary. As shown in Figure 26, advisor pay begins quite low. On average, first-year advisors make an estimated \$29,000/year. Their pay does not surpass \$50,000/year until they reach their tenth year working as an advisor. Given that three-

quarters of all advisors in Texas have fewer than ten years of experience, this implies that roughly 75% of advisors in Texas make less than \$50,000/year.

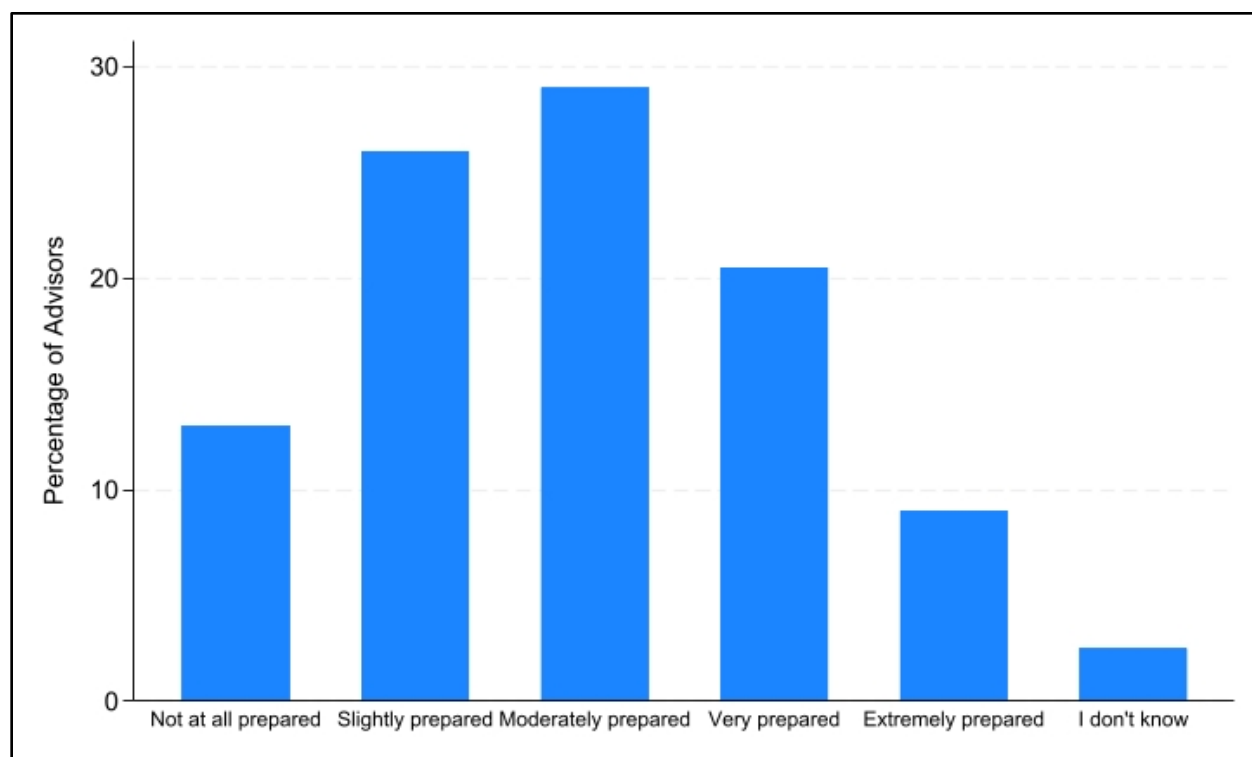
Figure 27: Predicted Average Base Salary for Advisors, by Years of Experience



Unevenness in Training, Professional Development, and Mentorship for Advisors

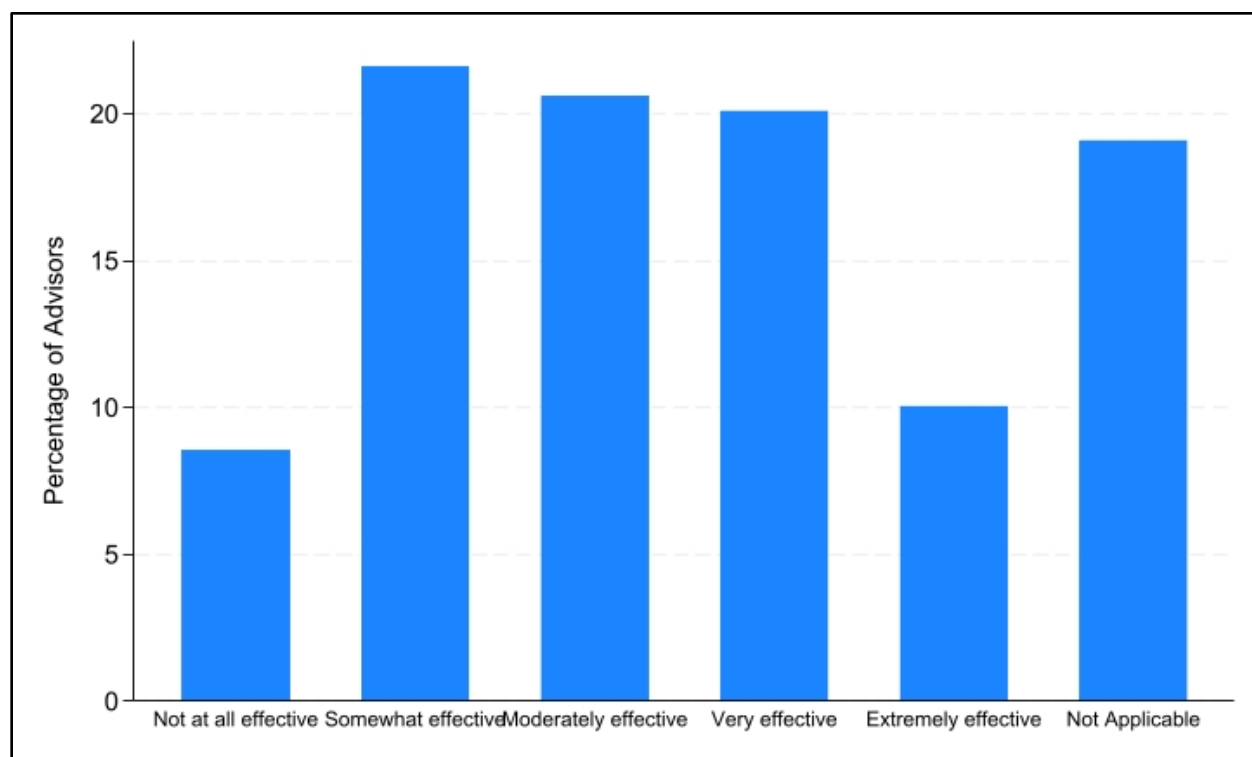
The final component of the professionalization of advising we highlight is the role of training, professional development, and mentorship for advisors. In the Advising Capacity Survey, we asked advisors a series of questions to gauge their perceptions of the formal training and supports they received before beginning their work as an advisor and once they had entered their role. As shown in Figure 27, advisors were more likely to feel unprepared than prepared when they first started working as an advisor. Roughly 40% of advisors felt that they were not at all or slightly prepared, while less than 10% felt extremely prepared to provide effective college and/or career advising.

Figure 28: Advisors' Perceptions of their Preparation to Provide Effective College and/or Career Advising When They First Began Working as an Advisor



Advisors were equally mixed in their views of the effectiveness of the pre-service training and professional development they received from their CAP. Figure 28 shows that roughly equal percentages of advisors viewed their training as not at all effective or extremely effective. Similarly, roughly equal percentages perceived the effectiveness of the pre-service training they received as in the middle three categories of response options (somewhat effective, moderately effective, or very effective). Overall, less than one-third of respondents reported that their pre-service training was very or extremely effective. One reasons for this low percentage is the fact that nearly one-fifth of advisors reported that they did not receive any formal pre-service training from their CAP before beginning their work as an advisor. It is unsurprising that such a high percentage of advisors felt unprepared for their role given that many of them either did not receive any pre-service training at all or perceived the training they did receive as minimally effective.

Figure 29: Advisors' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of the Pre-Service Training they Received from their College Advising Program



The vast majority (95%) of advisors do receive in-service professional development once they begin their position. As shown in Figure 29, advisors are more likely to rate this training as effective rather than ineffective. However, they tend to view this training as only moderately effective, as nearly half of all advisors provided this rating of the professional development they receive. In contrast, advisors tend to view mentorship from more experienced counselors or advisors as even more effective. Although nearly 10% of advisors viewed mentorship as not at all effective, they were more likely to rate mentorship as very or extremely effective. However, more than one-fifth of advisors reported that they had not received any mentorship in their role as an advisor. Excluding advisors who had not received any mentorship, nearly 60% of all advisors viewed the mentorship they received as very or extremely effective.

Figure 30: Advisors' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of the In-Service Training and Professional Development They Receive

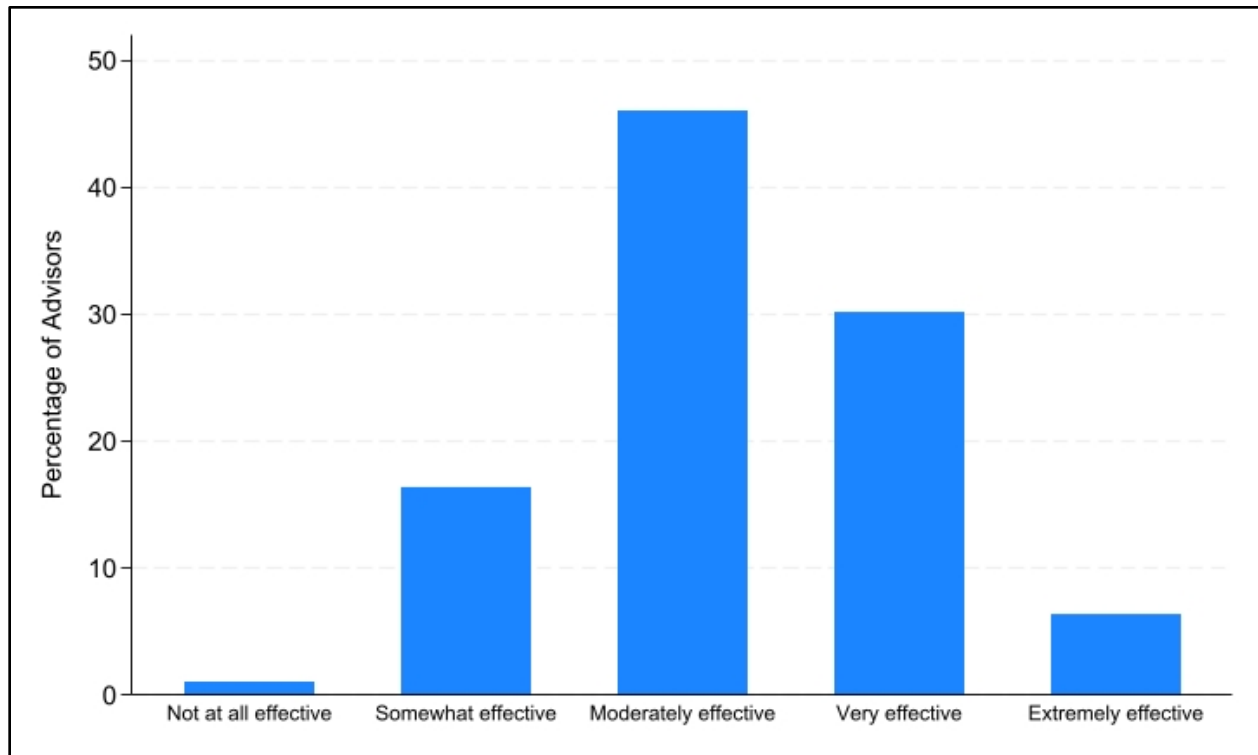
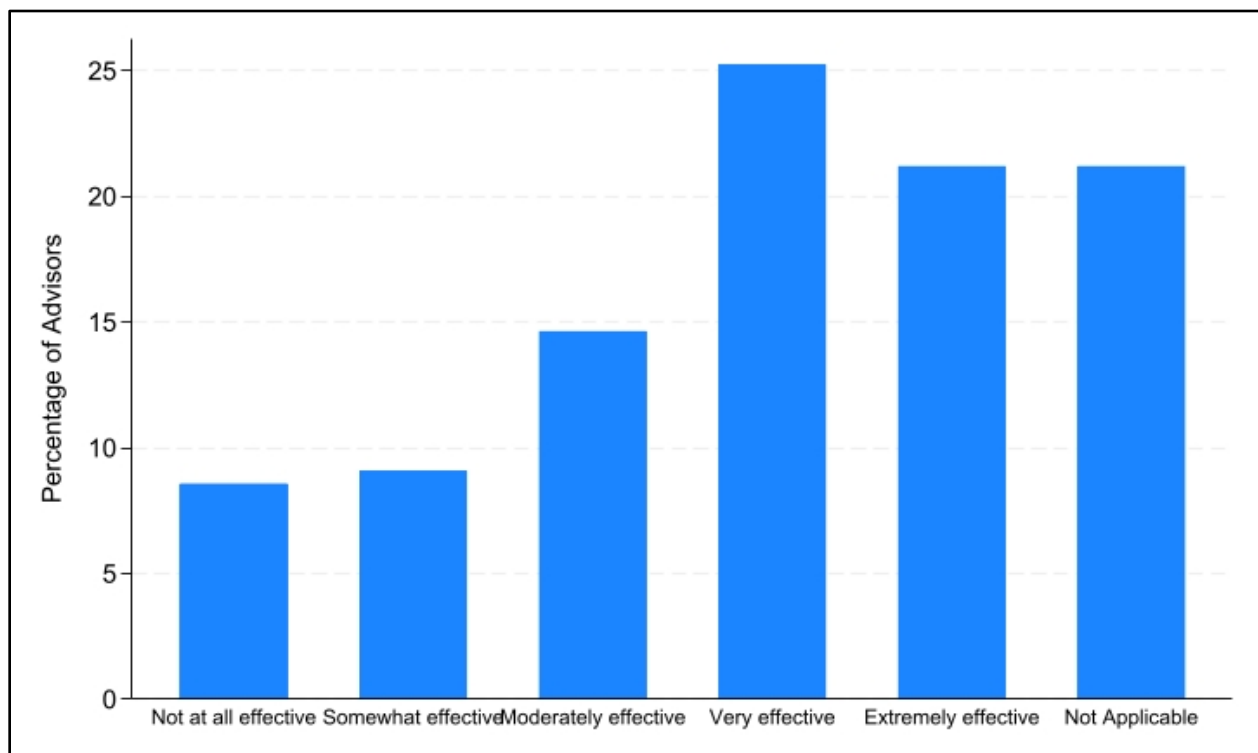


Figure 31: Advisors' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Mentorship



Summary of Professionalization and Advising Capacity

Although one explanation for the growth in the college advising labor force is the importance of college advising for shaping students' postsecondary outcomes, another explanation is likely the more limited barriers to entry into the advising profession compared to the requirements to work as a professional school counselor. Whereas counselors need multiple years of teaching experience, a graduate degree, and a license in counseling (in addition to higher pay), college advisors have few (if any) formal job requirements apart from a bachelor's degree. The prevalence of the "near-peer" model and programs like AmeriCorps likely contribute to the large supply of advisors that begin working directly after graduating from college and only stay in the field for a few years before pursuing other professional opportunities to advance their careers. While there may be benefits of employing this quasi-volunteerism model of advising, the results in this section show that the approach is not without its drawbacks.

The findings in this section underscore a clear point: there is likely no available and reliable substitute for professional experience. Advisors' navigational capacity, sociocultural capacity, and motivational capacity all grow with experience, as does their college and career knowledge. And while some of these capacities could theoretically be developed through in-service training, the majority of advisors report that the training they received was minimally effective or they received no pre-service training at all. They were equally lukewarm about the effectiveness of the in-service training they receive. Expanding and strengthening mentorship opportunities appears to be a promising strategy, given that advisors rated this form of professional development as most effective but more than one-fifth of advisors reported receiving no mentorship at all.

And while bolstering pre-service and in-service professional development and expanding mentorship opportunities may both bolster advising capacity, the results also suggest the importance of increasing advisor pay. Beginning advisors make less than \$30,000/year on average and do not

surpass \$50,000/year until they have gained ten years of experience, which very few do. As one Assistant Superintendent we spoke to stated, “Why is the lowest paid person in the building the one primarily responsible for ensuring kids go to college?”

Discussion and Recommendations

For decades, college advising has been a key strategy for supporting students' transitions into postsecondary education, but the last decade in particular has seen a surge in the types of advising reforms being made available to students, the organizations placing advisors in high schools, and rigorous research on the efficacy of these advising strategies. Initially promising results, often from smaller pilot projects, led to substantial investments and large-scale projects examining the effects of bolstering the advising capacity available to high school students. Despite a wave of initially promising results, many of these results have subsequently produced null effects when they were scaled to larger and more diverse populations of students. What are we to make of the growing literature base on advising reforms, and why have promising programs and interventions failed to replicate?

In this paper, we argue that the majority of college advising reforms can be characterized as guided by a *transactional advising* framework. From this perspective, students are treated as individual rational actors who simply need more and better information about higher education in order to make more optimal decisions about college enrollment and persistence. These reforms are addressing a real problem. As discussed in our literature review and demonstrated empirically in our study, student-to-counselor ratios remain high, counselors and advisors often have limited time to provide college and career advising, and their knowledge of college and career topics may need to be strengthened if they are to provide reliable information to college-intending students.

Nevertheless, we argue that the *transactional advising* framework may be limited in its conceptualization of the problems hampering students' transition into higher education and call for renewed emphasis on what we refer to as a *transformational advising* approach. From this perspective, advising reforms must be mindful of other dimensions of advising capacity typically neglected in many of the most large-scale and rigorous studies of college advising. Specifically, advisors'

navigational capacity may be necessary to allow them to effectively navigate and change the policies, procedures, and systems implemented by the school that may have historically limited students' college opportunity. *Sociocultural capacity* is critical to ensure counselors and advisors understand the diverse backgrounds of their students, can attune their advising practices to the specific populations of students they serve, and can thoughtfully shape school college-going culture. And *motivational capacity* is necessary to allow counselors and advisors to identify barriers to students' college motivation and use effectively strategies that can support student motivation.

Although we hope the findings contained in this report provide novel insights into the multiple dimensions of advising capacity, the current study is an initial foray into a longer-term research and reform agenda. Future research must examine the extent to which these various dimensions of advising capacity relate to students' actual advising experiences and postsecondary outcomes, how they can be most effectively developed through training and professional development for counselors and advisors, and which investments in bolstering advising capacity are most cost-effective at improving students' postsecondary outcomes. The sections below articulate additional recommendations for research, policy, and practice informed by the current study.

Recommendations

- Collect More Robust Data on Counselors and Advisors – Although the results of this study illuminate advising capacity in Texas, our understanding of the supply and effectiveness of advising will remain limited without more robust data collected on counselors and advisors. First, the Texas Education Agency should create a role code that allows districts to report employees who are working as college and/or career advisors. Second, TEA should collect student-to-counselor (and possibly advisor) linking data. Data linking students to classrooms and teachers has substantially broadened the research possibilities for studying teacher

effectiveness. Collecting similar data for counselors and advisors would likewise open up a number of new research possibilities that could further strengthen advising capacity.

- Create Mechanisms to Document CAPs Working in Districts – To our knowledge, this study was the first attempt to systematically document the CAPs partnering with school districts across the state. While the results show that CAPs are more widespread than initially believed, the data collected through the Advising Capacity Survey is still a piecemeal view of the extent of partnerships districts have established with CAPs. Because school districts must enter into agreements with CAPs so that advisors may work in the district, these contracts and/or agreements should be collected and reported to the state to promote greater transparency on the CAPs and advisors working with our students and ensure student safety.
- Design Approaches to Align CAP, School, and District Strategy – Given the extensive use of CAPs and college advisors in K-12 schools combined with the lack of district satisfaction with CAP programs, alignment between CAP, school, and district strategy is likely necessary. This is particularly important given the diverse goals pursued, student populations targeted, and advising strategies employed by many CAPs, that may or may not align coherently with school and district strategy. For example, guides and trainings could be created for audiences of district leaders that equip them to effectively partner with CAPs and that are attuned to the social, geographic, and economic realities of the districts. Efforts such as the Texas Education Agency’s Effective Advising Framework may be a promising approach for strengthening district college and career advising strategy.
- Clarify and Support Advisor Roles and Expectations – While nearly one-third of advisors serve fewer than 100 students and likely have sufficient time to provide more intensive advising to every student in their caseload, nearly as many advisors are serving 500 or even

1,000 or more students, making it all but impossible to provide 1:1 advising to students. If we believe that *transformational advising* is needed to allow advisors to understand students' social and cultural backgrounds and provide the support needed to effectively motivate students to prepare for college and career, this can only be accomplished if advising loads are manageable. For example, if advisors spend half of their time on college and career advising, they have roughly 80 hours of advising time available to students each month. Meeting with each student for one hour per month would require a caseload of only 80 students, while 30-minute monthly meetings with each student would necessitate no more than 160 students assigned to each advisor.

- Raise Advisor Salaries – Beginning college advisors make far less than beginning teachers, despite the fact that most CAP programs require advisors to have earned a college degree. It is no surprise that many advisors leave the profession after a short time given the low pay. Although salary is not the only way to bolster advising capacity, we believe it to be necessary to recruit and retain professional advisors that can have a transformative effect on the lives of their students. We recognize constraints on raising advising salaries, such as federal programs (e.g. AmeriCorps) that have inflexible salary schedules.
- Make Advising a Professional Career Path – While the benefit of many CAP models is their low “barriers to entry,” allowing students from diverse backgrounds and majors to work in college advising, this is a double-edged sword: there are few professional requirements to becoming a college advisor. Ensuring advisors have at least a minimum level of expertise in different college and career advising domains would likely benefit the field and further professionalize the occupation of college advisors. Similarly, although many teachers bemoan having to leave the classroom in order to advance in their careers, there are a diverse array of positions teachers can transition into: instructional coaches, curriculum

designers, counselors, and administrators. There are fewer (if any) well-defined pathways for occupational advancement among college advisors. Creating them would be another way to bolster advising capacity and retain advisors in the field of education.

- Invest in Future Research Unpacking how Dimensions of Advising Capacity Relate to Student Outcomes – One of the most vexing issues in research on college advising is that a number of rigorous, experimental studies have found no effects of college advisors on student outcomes, despite both other research and ample lived experience of advisors suggesting that advising can have a dramatic impact on students' chances of experiencing college and career success. Although research on college advisors has grown, our understanding of which dimensions of advising capacity are most critical and how they shape student outcomes is still nascent. Additionally, few studies have rigorously examined how training and professional development for counselor and advisors can develop their advising capacities in ways that will reliably lead to improved student outcomes. Future research should build upon the present study by linking dimensions of advising capacity with how students experience college advising as well as their college and career outcomes.

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