
Exploring the Role and Effects of High School Advising on CTE Students' Transitions to Postsecondary Education and the Workforce Synthesis

Purpose: Students benefit from high quality advising that can help them understand and prepare for the transition after high school, yet little is known about how students are prepared for career-related postsecondary options or about the advising provided to Career and Technical Education (CTE) students. This brief synthesizes findings that cut across three collaboratively conducted studies looking at the role and effects of high school career-focused advising, with an emphasis on CTE students.

Key Findings

The studies were intended to collectively explore a set of research questions related to school-based advising. Below are key findings related to each question:

1. How is school-based postsecondary transition advising structured?

School-based advising was offered in three primary ways: a) one-on-one advising with school counselors or other advisors; b) advising that occurred through courses or advisory classes and often included the use of technology tools; and c) experiential learning that occurred through work-based learning, CTE courses, or other career-oriented experiences. Students noted that their CTE instructors provided some of the most useful career-focused advising.

2. What topics do advisors cover relative to preparation for the postsecondary transition?

The content of postsecondary transition advising changed over time, starting with a broader, more exploratory emphasis, and becoming more focused in later grades. Postsecondary transition advising had a primary emphasis on college with careers being less frequently discussed. For example, the survey study found that 62% of students reported strong college support compared to only 29% of students who reported strong career support.

3. How do students' backgrounds affect their advising experiences?

Certain populations of students were more likely to receive advising or to report more planning support. These populations included students with higher levels of parental support, more academically advanced students, and students with some level of personal initiative. Qualitative data also suggested that students with average academic achievement were less likely to receive advising support than students at either end of the academic spectrum.

4. How do the school culture and structure—including the overall emphasis on CTE—affect the advising experience?

Career-focused advising was more likely to happen in schools that had a specific emphasis on careers or CTE. Smaller schools were also associated with more frequent advising and qualitative data suggested that the advising in smaller schools was of higher quality because staff were more likely to know their students.

5. How does advising influence the CTE-related activities students do in high school that are associated with postsecondary decisions?

Career-focused advising was linked with higher participation in career-oriented activities, such as becoming a CTE concentrator, participation in high school internships, and taking CTE dual enrollment courses. In interviews, students reported that advising may not have affected their decisions on what to do, but that it helped them move their own plans into action.

6. How does advising affect students' postsecondary decisions?

The studies found that career-focused advising tended to shift the types of colleges that students attended—with students less likely to enroll in four-year institutions and, in one study, more likely to enroll in two-year institutions.

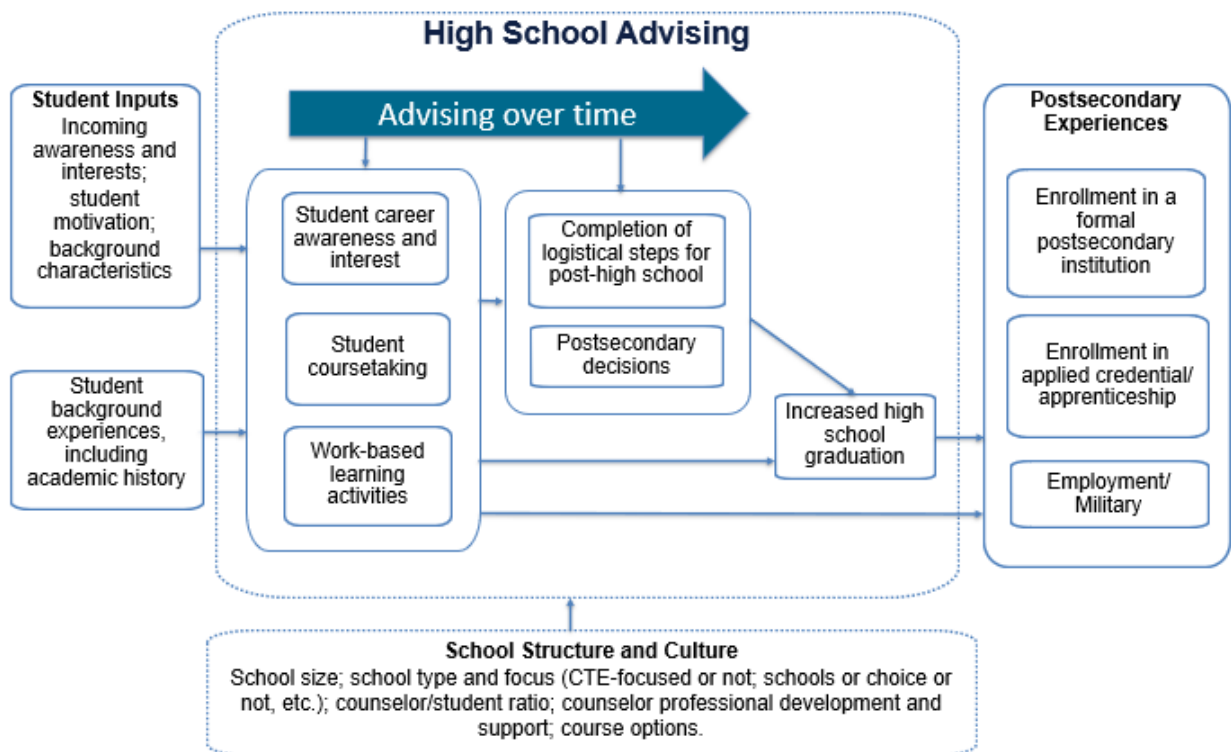
7. Does the relationship between advising and student outcomes differ by student characteristics?

The career coaching study found little difference by subgroups, except that White students who met with coaches earned more CTE dual enrollment credits. Additional research on this question would be useful.

Conceptual Framework

The research team developed an initial Theory of Change for Advising for CTE Students. Figure 1 shows the final Theory of Change for CTE Advising.

Figure 1: Theory of Change for Advising for CTE Students



Cross-Cutting Methods Takeaways

We also identified two cross-cutting takeaways related to the methodology of studies on advising.

Takeaway 1: A core methodological challenge is identifying appropriate outcomes for advising. Advising is intended to expand student interests and to help them access activities aligned with their interests. Most data sources do not allow researchers to investigate interests; therefore, defining and measuring alignment is difficult.

Takeaway 2: Given that students with certain characteristics are more likely to participate in advising experiences, it is challenging to tease out whether advising outcomes are due to the advising itself or the interest and motivation of students receiving advising.

Methods: This synthesis combines findings from three separate studies. The first was a survey study of 9,000 seniors in 172 New York City High Schools that looked at the support students received around college and careers. The second was an impact study of a career coaching program implemented in North Carolina. The third was a qualitative study that used interviews with school staff and students in high schools in New York City and North Carolina.

For more information about the individual studies, please visit earlycollegeresearch.uncg.edu/ or email the Principal Investigator, Julie Edmunds, Ph.D., at jedmunds@serve.org.

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