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# College & Career Advising & Mentoring Program Evaluation 2019

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# COLLEGE & CAREER ADVISING & MENTORING PROGRAM **EVALUATION** 2019

# COLLEGE & CAREER ADVISING & MENTORING PROGRAM EVALUATION
## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Idaho's College and Career Advising and Mentoring Program is a five-year intervention intended to enable Idaho's Local Educational Agencies' (both school districts and charter schools) efforts to support Idaho students' preparation for college and career readiness. Such efforts include opportunities for students to identify strengths, areas for improvement and areas of interest in regard to career and postsecondary education goals. In 2018, the Idaho Legislature requested an independent evaluation of the Program. This report, by the Idaho Policy Institute, serves as that evaluation.

Student-level data from the Idaho Department of Education, school-level data from the National Center for Education Statistics, and Local Educational Agency plans from the Idaho State Board of Education were used to examine program participation and outcomes. The evaluation considers the Program's design, use of funds, effectiveness and several other relevant metrics.

Analysis reveals a number of issues preventing an accurate evaluation at this stage of the Program. First, although Local Educational Agencies (LEA) are required to submit plans, the plans submitted have been incomplete. Second, LEAs are not required to submit budgets with their plans nor provide expense reports, limiting the ability to track use of funds and determine funding impact on program effectiveness. Third, the funding allocation formula limits small LEAs' ability to implement programs. Fourth, metrics necessary to measure the intended outcomes of the program are both inconsistent among Local Educational Agencies and insufficient. For instance, the current use of go-on rates to measure program success does not account for career readiness. Fifth, the Program was created alongside other statewide programs intended to support similar outcomes, thereby making it difficult to separate effects of individual programs. Finally, and perhaps most significant, the Program is designed as a five-year intervention for eighth grade though twelfth grade students. However, the current data available for analysis only represents two years of the intervention. Therefore analysis at this stage is premature and could lead to inaccurate conclusions.

Idaho has recognized the importance of preparing its students for their postsecondary future. The state's College and Career Advising and Mentoring Program is one intervention in place intended to aid in this preparation. Ongoing evaluation and data collection is essential to better understand the effects this Program is having on Idaho students. Clearer reporting standards and improvement of data collection methods will help to pave the way for more conclusive evaluation in the future. Finally, the Program's ability to affect change will be better represented in 2021 when the first set of students who started the Program in eighth grade graduate from high school.

# BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

In 2016, the Idaho Legislature amended statute to create the current College and Career Advisors and Student Mentor Program (Program). The Legislature also provided funding for the Program. The Program's intention is to improve students' and parents' knowledge regarding postsecondary opportunities and support Idaho students' preparation for college and career readiness. School districts and charter schools (also known as Local Educational Agencies or LEAs) were required to develop a College and Career Advising and Student Mentoring Plan (Plan) to enable students' acquisition of the knowledge and skills needed to achieve academic success and be college and/or career ready when graduating high school. Each year, LEAs must submit this Plan to the Office of the State Board of Education (OSBE). The Plan is required to include a program description and three required metrics used to measure LEA progress, as well as one additional metric chosen by the LEA.

Required Plan metrics include:

1. Percent of high school learning plans developed and reviewed annually by grade level
2. Number and percentage of students who go on to some form of postsecondary education (one and two years after graduation)
3. Number of students graduating high school with a technical certificate or associate degree

LEAs' chosen additional metrics must help determine the effectiveness of the Program.

# EVALUATION AND RESULTS

## METHODS

The data used to create this report was provided by OSBE. This data included student-level characteristics and academic data used to determine how the Program may affect students based on gender, race and ethnicity, economic need and English proficiency. Data from three school years (2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18) was collected and combined into a single data set. Some school level data was collected from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Every year of student-level data provided by OSBE represented a unique student cohort. In other words, each year contains data for a different group of students that graduated in that year. Overall, the dataset included data for 53,501 students in 161 LEAs.

OSBE also provided the Plans that LEAs submitted for the Program. In these Plans, each LEA is required to describe its chosen program(s) and measures of progress, as outlined above. Plans for the 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years were collected and reviewed. Their information was entered into a dataset. Not every plan for the 2018-19 school year had been received before creating this report.

The initial stages of evaluation proved that the LEAs and OSBE are able to report and

track the success of the postsecondary education readiness aspect of the Program through the required metrics such as percentage of students who go on to some form of postsecondary education (known as the go-on rate) or the number of students receiving an associate degree while in high school. However, there has not been a clear and consistent metric identified to measure how the Program is impacting students' career readiness.

At this time, the data available cannot be used to make accurate Program evaluation for several reasons.

1. Many of the LEA's submitted plans were incomplete
2. Some LEAs did not submit the required plans for each Program year
3. LEAs defined the required metrics differently and collected them from different sources, so the reported data is not compatible
4. The Program is new and the data does not represent the Program's full intended intervention of five years
5. The plans do not require all the LEAs to report on a common measure of academic student success other than go-on rate
6. There is currently no data that adequately measures the career readiness of students

That said, provided below is a descriptive analysis of the data collected.

# ELEMENTS OF EVALUATION

## PROGRAM DESIGN

The Program allows for flexibility in choice and application among LEAs. LEAs can choose a program from an approved list of interventions based on what works best for the particular LEA's funding and school environment. Plans must contain required measures, as well as an additional measure LEAs determine best represents progress in helping prepare students for college and career readiness. Although LEAs are required to submit a Plan, LEAs receive funding from the state whether or not a Plan is submitted. This is an area for overall programmatic improvement, as outlined more thoroughly in the Use of Funds section of this report.

The current LEA Plans are not uniform enough to be used for accurate evaluation. Currently there is no required standardized format for Plans. Although OSBE does offer a Plan template and support for filling out Plans, LEAs do not consistently access these resources. Streamlining the Plans' reporting requirements would also be helpful for LEAs, as our analysis indicated that LEAs often do not provide narrative explanations or answer questions that ask for similar information elsewhere. Eliminating this type of duplicative reporting may lead to more complete Plans.

Finally, the LEA representatives writing the Plans may not be the same people implementing the plans. Without engagement of the staff carrying out the Plan and accurate reporting of use of funds, it is difficult to determine if programs carried out mirror those outlined in the Plans.

## USE OF FUNDS

The Legislature initially appropriated $2.5 million to the Program. Funding has since increased to $9 million. Funds are awarded to LEAs based on the number of students enrolled in grades 8-12. Schools with more than 100 students are awarded $10,000 or a per student rate (whichever is larger). Schools with less than 100 students are awarded $5,000 or $100 per student (again, whichever amount is greater) per Idaho Code 33-1002. Distributing funds based on number of students, rather than need, means some students may benefit more than others. For instance, large LEAs may receive enough money to hire new, well-trained staff and operate advising centers, whereas smaller LEAs may not receive enough funds to hire new staff. Overall, adding more and better trained employees, such as counselors or peer mentors, may contribute to higher student success because having more employees lowers counselor/mentor to student ratios and creates a better chance of students receiving one-on-one help. It may also improve staff's ability to recognize students in need of more specialized support.

In fiscal year 2018, 72% (116 of 161) of LEAs reported an optional estimated budget with their Plans. However, state agencies are unable to effectively track Program funds because LEAs are not required by Idaho Code or Administrative Rules to submit budgets. Even though the majority of LEAs submitted informal estimated budgets, there is not a way to measure actual expenditures, as this is also something they are not required to report. Requiring both proposed budgets and past-year expenditures would enable tracking of Program funds. Given the limitations of the data received regarding Program budgeting, a current in-depth analysis of the use of funds is not possible. Accurate tracking of budgets and expenditures from year-to-year would aid in long-term evaluation efforts to outline specific use of funds and determine funding impact on program effectiveness.

## PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

This is a program designed with multiple steps for students that start in the eighth grade and continue until high school graduation. The Program is intended as a five-year intervention. To measure the true effectiveness of this program requires a cohort of students to be involved from grades 8-12. The first such group of students will graduate in 2021. It is also important to compare success across cohorts of students, so an ongoing evaluation is also suggested.

This Program is intended to improve student success in the workforce, whether that success involves college, apprenticeships or other work-related training and preparation. Currently, there is no accurate way for state agencies to measure where students are going after high school. A collection of measures must be developed to account for various opportunities for Idaho's high school graduates, including college, trade schools, jobs and military or religious service, among others.

The only measurement of student success available for analysis are student go-on rates. Therefore, this report uses one-year go-on rates (the percentage of students that enter postsecondary education the first year after high school graduation) as a general proxy indicator of student success for college readiness. Although the data analyzed may indicate patterns, caution should be used in drawing any conclusions regarding cause and effect relationships.

This is, perhaps, the greatest limitation in this report - go-on rates alone do not account for the success of students whose goals are not college oriented. Some students plan to go directly into the labor force, start apprenticeships or enlist in the military. This program intends to prepare students for all of these paths. Until metrics are available to track students following these other career tracks, it will be impossible to measure the overall effectiveness of this Program.

# RESULTS

## SCHOOL PROGRAM CHOICE

A summary of the data collected from the 2017-18 Plans submitted by LEAs is provided in Table 1. For the 2017-18 year, 161 LEAs received funding. Nineteen of these LEAs have schools that only go through eighth grade and are not included in the overall data reported in this section, as the required metrics are not fully applicable to these LEAs.

**TABLE 1:** DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF SCHOOL PROGRAM CHOICE

| Type of Program | Description | # of LEAs FY2018 | % of total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Counselor | College/Career prep training for current or new hired professional | 61 | 43% |
| Teacher and/ or Paraprofessional | College/Career prep training for a current staff/faculty | 23 | 16% |
| Near Peer/College Student Mentors | Specially-trained mentor hired specifically to help students prepare for College/Career | 9 | 6% |
| Virtual Coach or Mentor | A College/Career Readiness-trained mentor available via the internet | 3 | 2% |
| Gear Up | Federally funded program focused on early planning/strategies for college readiness | 11 | 8% |
| Transition Coordinator | Employee of a college/university that goes to high schools to help prepare students | 6 | 4% |
| Student Ambassadors | | 0 | 0% |
| Hybrid | LEA with two or more approaches | 28 | 20% |
| No Plan | LEA did not submit plan any year | 1 | 1% |
| **Total** | | **142** | **100%** |

Note: For clarity, schools that listed multiple plans have been counted in this table as having hybrid plans. Subsequent graphs do not remove this duplication, resulting in slightly higher program counts.

# Program Choice by Racial Diversity

As racial and ethnic diversity may impact students' college and career readiness and choices, such students may need greater support. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (2017), Idaho's population is 91% white, which suggests most Idaho schools will have predominantly white students. Therefore, we created a relative diversity measure for Idaho schools by coding all schools in the dataset according to the racial/ethnic makeup of grade 8-12 students and dividing the schools into subgroups. Schools with a student body that is over 90% white are classified **low diversity**, those that are 85-90% white are classified **medium diversity**, 75-84% as **high diversity** and those with less than 75% white students as **very high diversity**. More diverse schools were more likely to use a hybrid program and less diverse schools were more likely to use a single program.

## FIGURE 1: PROGRAM TYPE BY DIVERSITY CATEGORY
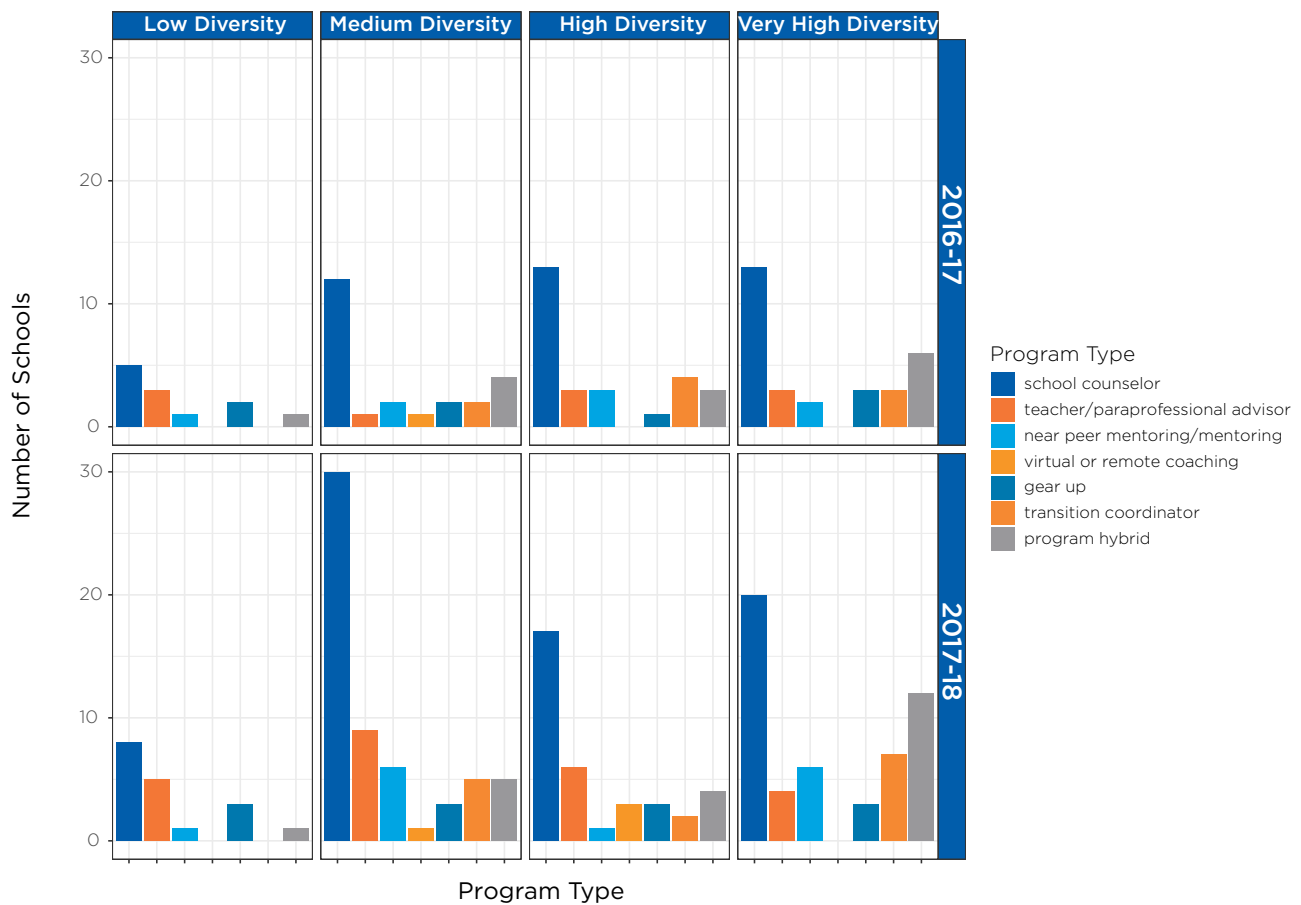
## Program Choice by Funding

As mentioned, the overall amount of funding LEAs receive for the Program may impact their ability to choose specific types of programs to implement. To measure if program choice was related to funding, we divided overall LEA funding into quartiles, with "Low Funding" representing the bottom 25% of funding numbers and "Very High Funding" representing the top 25% of funding numbers. Program choices varied across funding types and years. Regardless of funding amount, school counselor was always the most common program choice, with teachers or paraprofessional as advisors nearly always the second most common choice. Because funding is determined by number of students, funding increases as school size increases. If requirements were put in place for LEAs to create budgets and report expenditures, then future analysis could look at the specific use of funds across programs.

**FIGURE 2:** PROGRAM TYPE BY TOTAL FUNDING CATEGORY
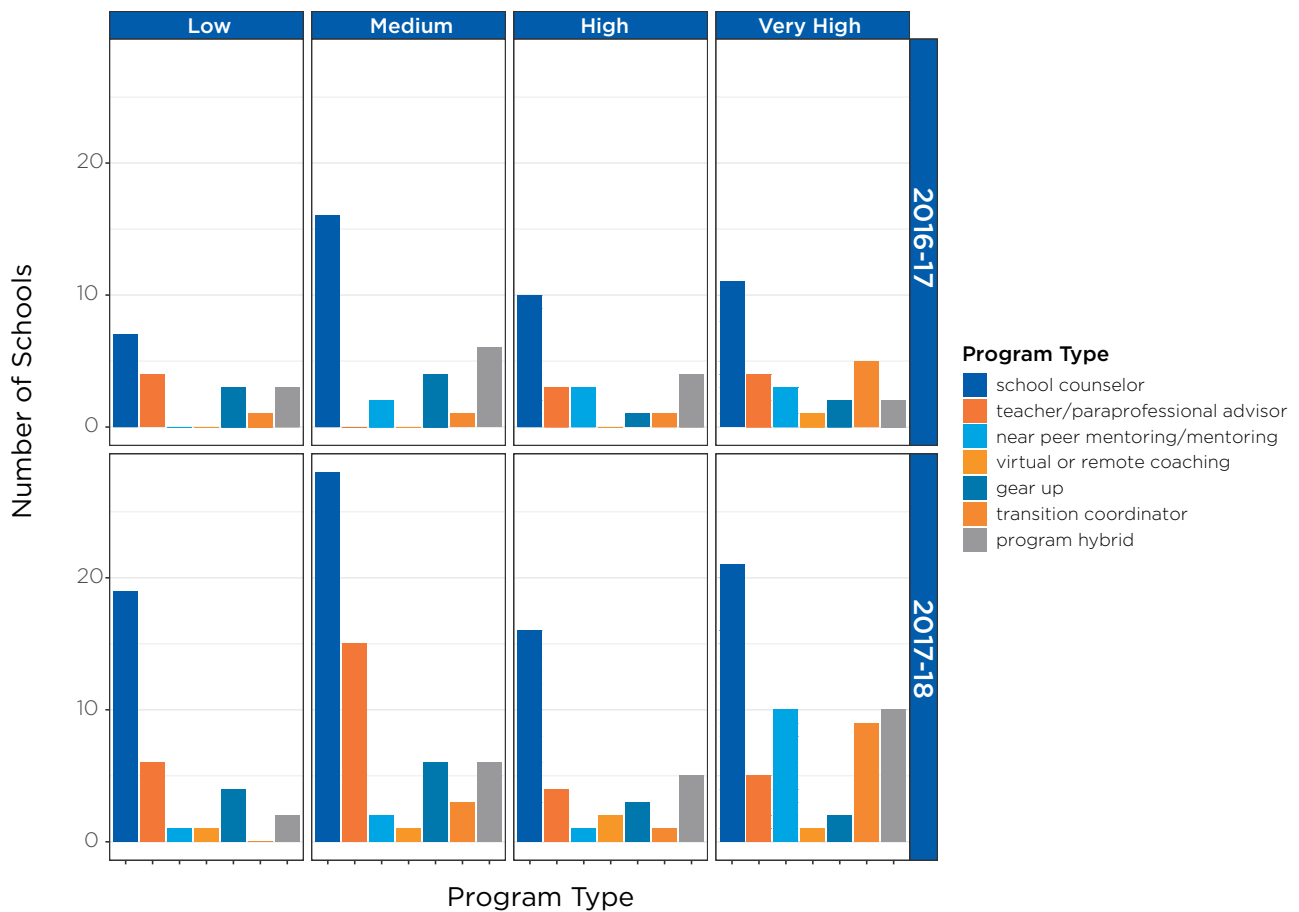


## Program Type

Ultimately, the Program should seek to evaluate the success of each program type as it relates to college and career readiness. Since go-on rates were the only metric available for this analysis, we did examine go-on rate by program type and found that go-on rates varied by program type. However, many other factors may be impacting go-on rates outside of program type. In addition, the Program is new, as mentioned, and there are not

enough years of data to draw any cause and effect relationships. Finally, the analysis of go-on rates for programs used by only a small number of LEAs are more susceptible to small variations in data.

**FIGURE 3:** GO ON RATE BY PROGRAM TYPE
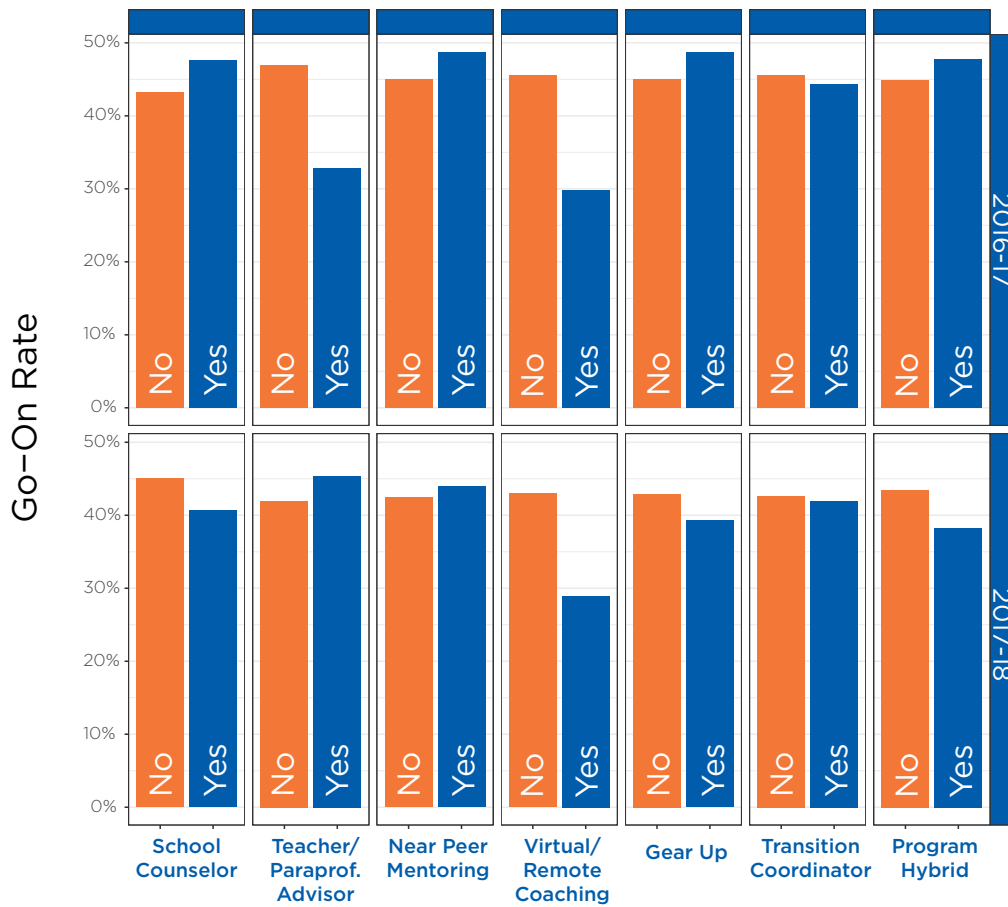


## REQUIRED METRICS

As previously discussed, LEA Plans are required to report which program is being used, as well as data from three mandatory metrics and one additional LEA selected metric. This data is inconsistently reported, as shown in the Table 2.

**TABLE 2:** LEA METRIC REPORTING COMPLETION

| Required Metric | % LEAs Reporting | % LEAs Not Reporting |
|---|---|---|
| Percent of High School Plans Reviewed | 79% | 21% |
| Go-On Rates | 50% | 50% |
| Number of certificates and associates degrees | 86% | 14% |
| Additional Metric | 53% | 47% |

## Percent of High School Plans Reviewed

Individualized high school learning plans help all students learn about postsecondary opportunities and make choices early in high school that will help them prepare for those opportunities. Since 1998, LEAs have been required to help students develop such a plan in eighth grade and review the plan each subsequent school year (thus the plans are oftentimes referred to as the "eighth grade plan"). Requiring schools to review students' plans, and subsequently review the plans with the students, increases the potential of each student's understanding of their college and career opportunities. LEAs are required to annually report the percent of learning plans reviewed by school personnel with individual students. This information is self-reported by LEAs. However, there is no way for state agencies to ensure all student plans are thoroughly reviewed each year. The majority of LEAs reported reviewing 100% of student plans. Ninety-three (65%) LEAs reported 100% of plans reviewed, while 20 (14%) LEAs reported less than 100% of plans reviewed. Finally, 29 (21%) did not report this information.

## Go-On Rates

LEAs are required in their annual Plans to report the number and percent of graduating students that have enrolled in postsecondary education for both the first and second year after graduation. In fiscal year 2018, 71 (50%) LEAs reported all required go-on information. Forty-two (30%) partially reported the required go-on information and 29 (20%) did not report any go-on information. Long-term evaluation of this program is hindered without complete and accurate go-on information being recorded each year at the school, LEA and state levels.

Due to missing and inconsistent data, the student-level cohort data provided by OSBE was used together with the plans. NCES school-level data was also used to analyze go-on rates by individual school categories. The data shown here reflects one year go-on rates for the graduating classes of 2017 and 2018.

It must be noted, Idaho has engaged in a variety of efforts to increase college enrollment rates. Other programs, such as the "Fast Forward Program" and "Apply Idaho," which focus specifically on improving student go-on rates, have been functioning at the same time as the Program. In addition, some LEAs had preexisting college readiness programs, including federally funded Near Peer, GEAR UP or TRIO programs. Go-on data is likely also impacted as a result of these other programs, making it difficult to isolate the direct impact of the Program on go-on rates.

The following demonstrates that certain groups of students in these cohorts tended to go-on at higher rates than others.

### Locale

An indication of differences between urban and rural students' go-on rates may be useful in directing support to LEAs and schools with lower rates. In order to determine if this was the case in Idaho, NCES's indicator of school locale was used to create categories for comparison. NCES currently defines school locale along four overriding categories: City, Suburb, Town and Rural (for how each category is defined, see Appendix A). Among

schools that had an associated locale, schools in cities indicated higher go-on rates, while all other schools were relatively even.

**FIGURE 4:** GO ON RATE BY LOCALE
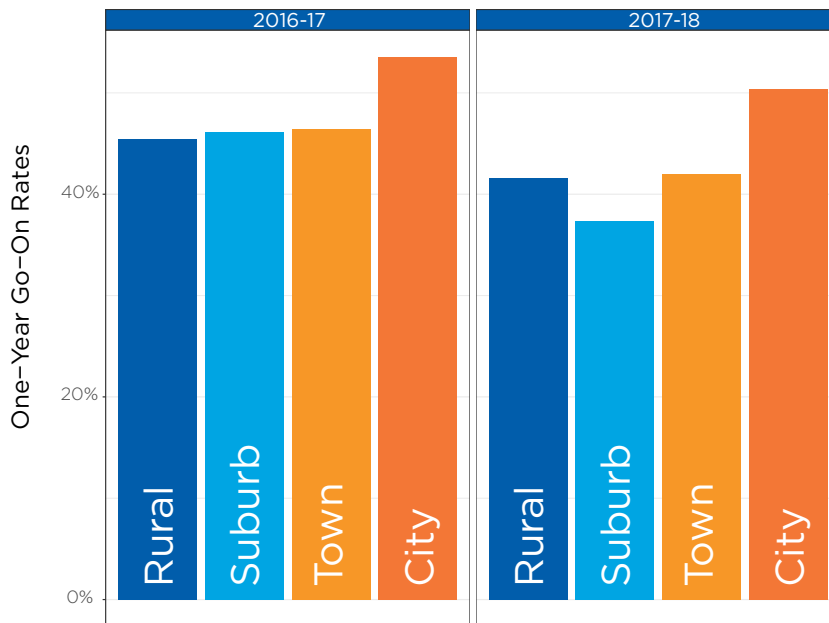


## Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Program Participation

Students for whom English is not their first language may have greater challenges when it comes to planning for their future. Idaho schools identify such students through a ten category classifications system for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students. For ease of analysis, we have collapsed these classifications into two categories: LEP students (those in the program or still undergoing monitoring) and non-LEP students (those now fluent, screened out or not applicable). There was a significant amount of data missing for this variable. Out of the eight possible categories, our two research years only contained data for two categories and four categories, respectively. That said, the data does suggest that students who either don't qualify for LEP or have completed LEP programs go on at higher rates than students who remain in the program.

**FIGURE 5:** GO ON RATE BY LEP STATUS



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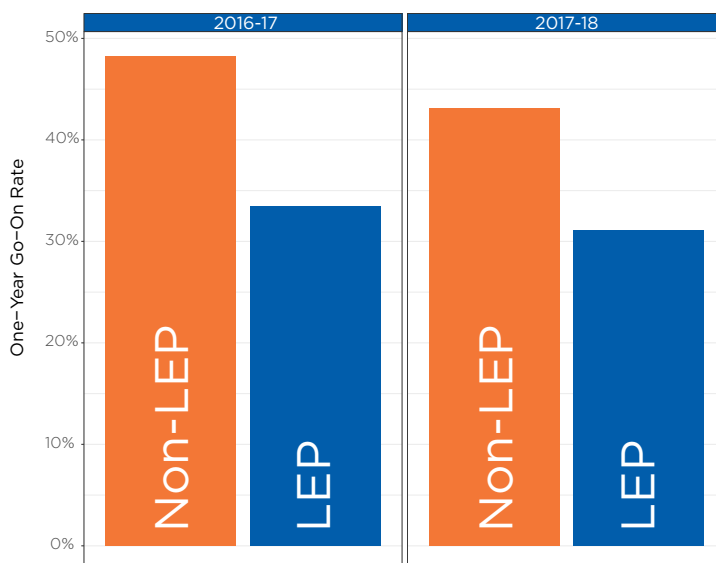
# Free and Reduced Lunch Status

Economic disadvantage is known to affect student performance and as such may also impact their choices regarding their careers and education after high school. While there is no direct measure of a student's level of economic security available, a common proxy is whether they are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. State data sorts students into five possible categories—free lunch eligible, reduced price eligible, district eligible, community eligible school and not eligible. It is important to note that while the state records this data as a single variable, they are actually determined at two separate levels of analysis. Free lunch eligible, reduced price eligible and not eligible are all student-level classifications determined by the student's own personal status. Conversely, a student is classified as district eligible or community eligible school if a high enough proportion of the LEAs'/schools' students qualify for free or reduced lunch. In that case, eligibility is granted to the entire LEA or school population, regardless of their personal eligibility status. As such, it is important to consider these classification groupings separately, since they are not directly comparable with one another. When reviewing student-level data, go-on rates were higher for students who were not eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

**FIGURE 6:** GO ON RATE BY FREE/REDUCED LUNCH STATUS
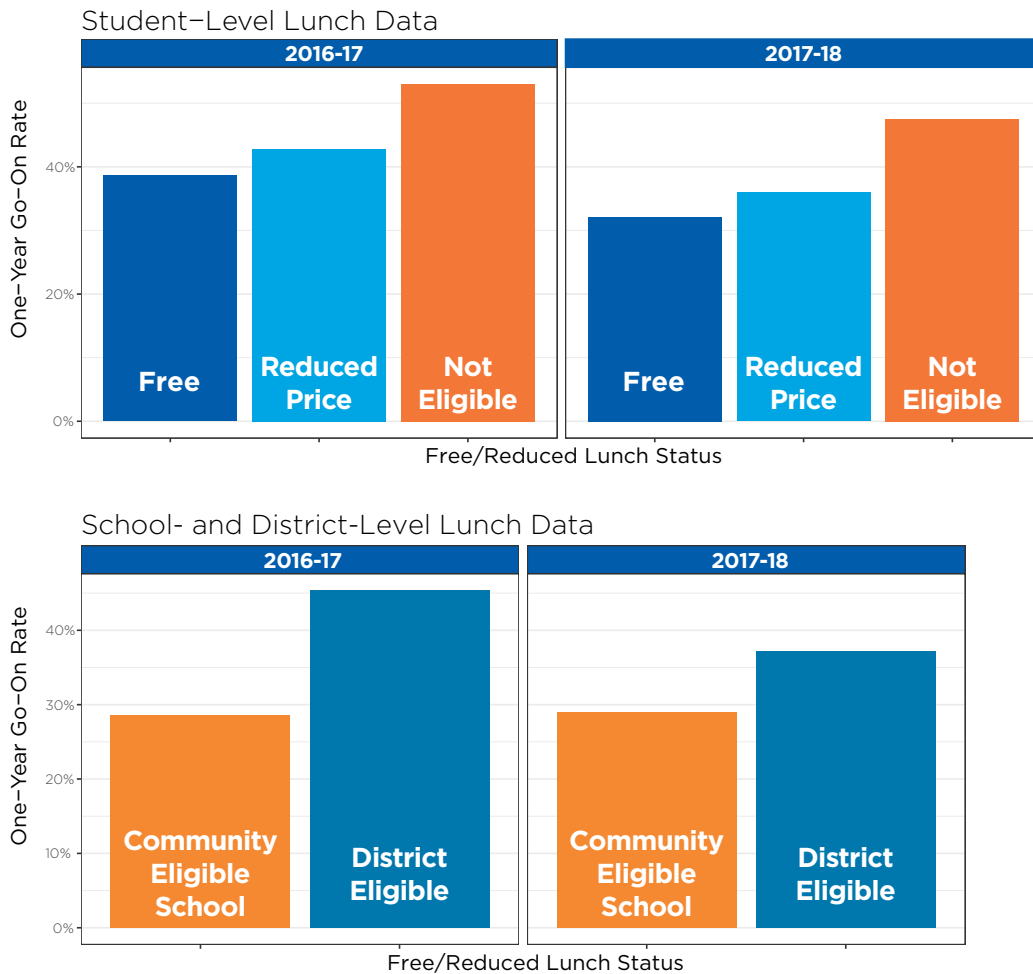
## Housing Security

An additional economic challenge faced by some students is housing insecurity. For some, this means having no permanent home of their own, in which case they may be moving from place to place or be literally experiencing homelessness. This uncertainty means that they have greater difficulty focusing in school and may be more likely to have poor attendance or behavioral issues. This, in turn, impacts their academic performance and likely impacts their planning for after high school graduation. Students that were reported as homeless had significantly lower go-on rates than other students.
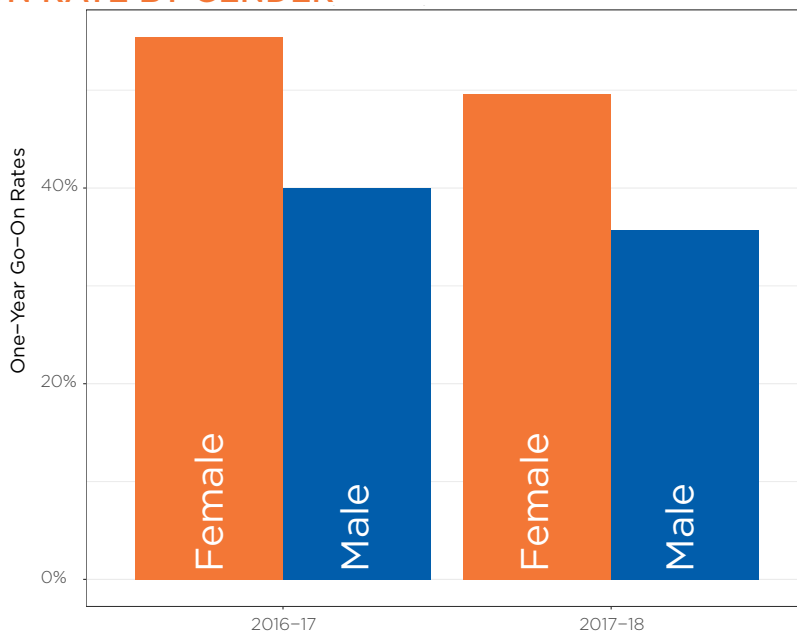
**FIGURE 7:** GO ON RATE BY HOUSING SECURITY
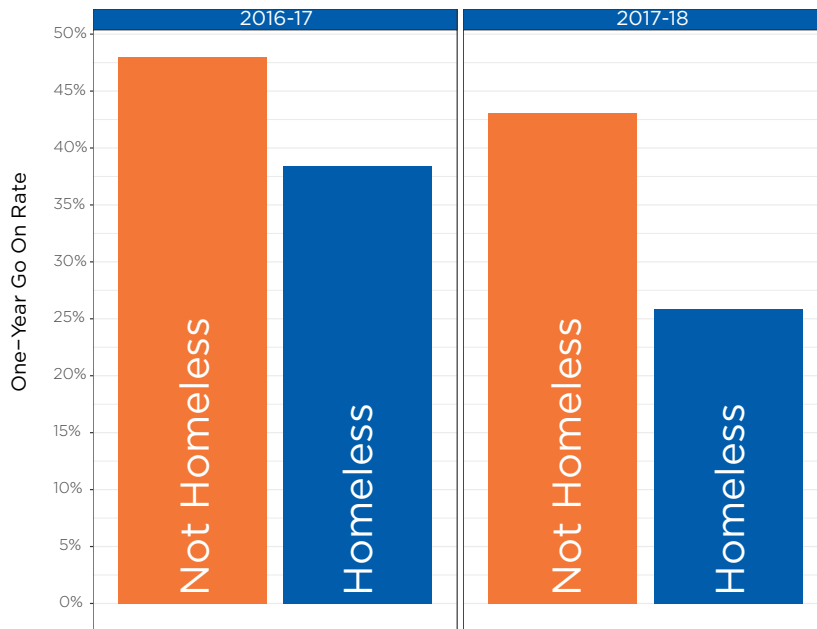


## Gender

Go-on rates may differ according to gender. Go-on rates across the state were consistently higher for female students than males.

**FIGURE 8:** GO ON RATE BY GENDER

## Ethnicity and Diversity

As previously mentioned, racial and ethnic diversity may impact students' college and career readiness and choices; therefore, such students may need greater support. Looking at ethnicity alone is challenging, due to the low-level of diversity in Idaho schools. In other words, go-on rates in racial and ethnic groups with smaller numbers of students are more susceptible to tiny changes being represented as a large overall change in percentage, which can create a false impression, so the data in the following graphic should be interpreted with caution.

**FIGURE 9:** GO ON RATE BY RACE/ETHNICITY
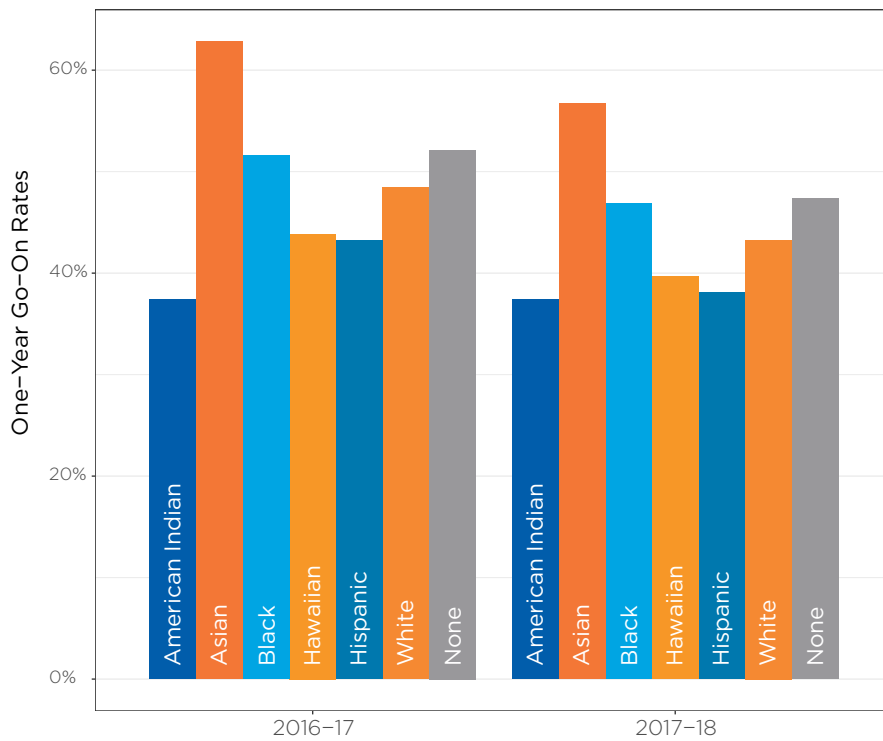


To look at any potential differences in performance related to diversity, we again used the relative diversity metric where schools with a student body that is over 90% white are classified low diversity, those that are 85-90% white are classified medium diversity, 75-84% as high diversity and those with less than 75% white students as very high diversity. Although the first year of data shows nearly no difference between the categories, the second year indicates less diverse schools have a higher go-on rate.
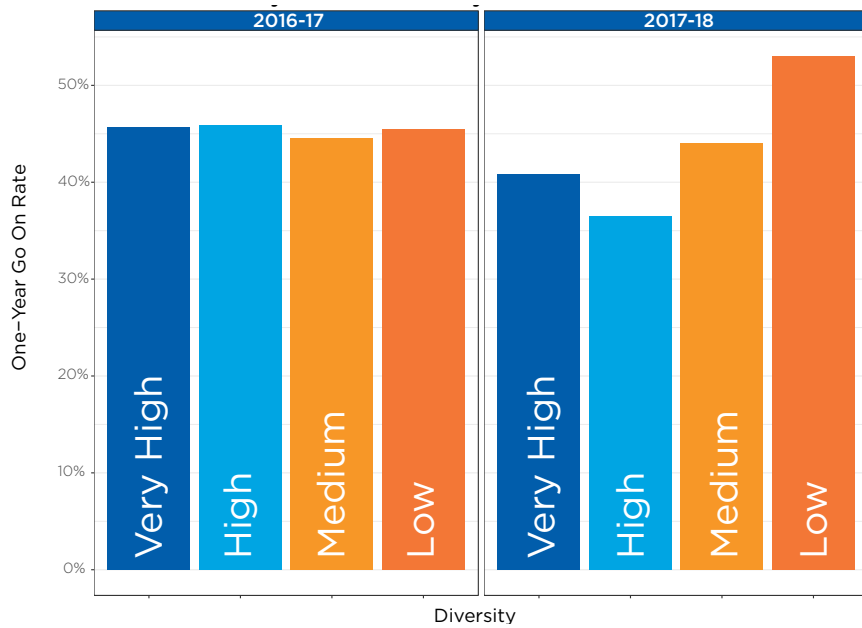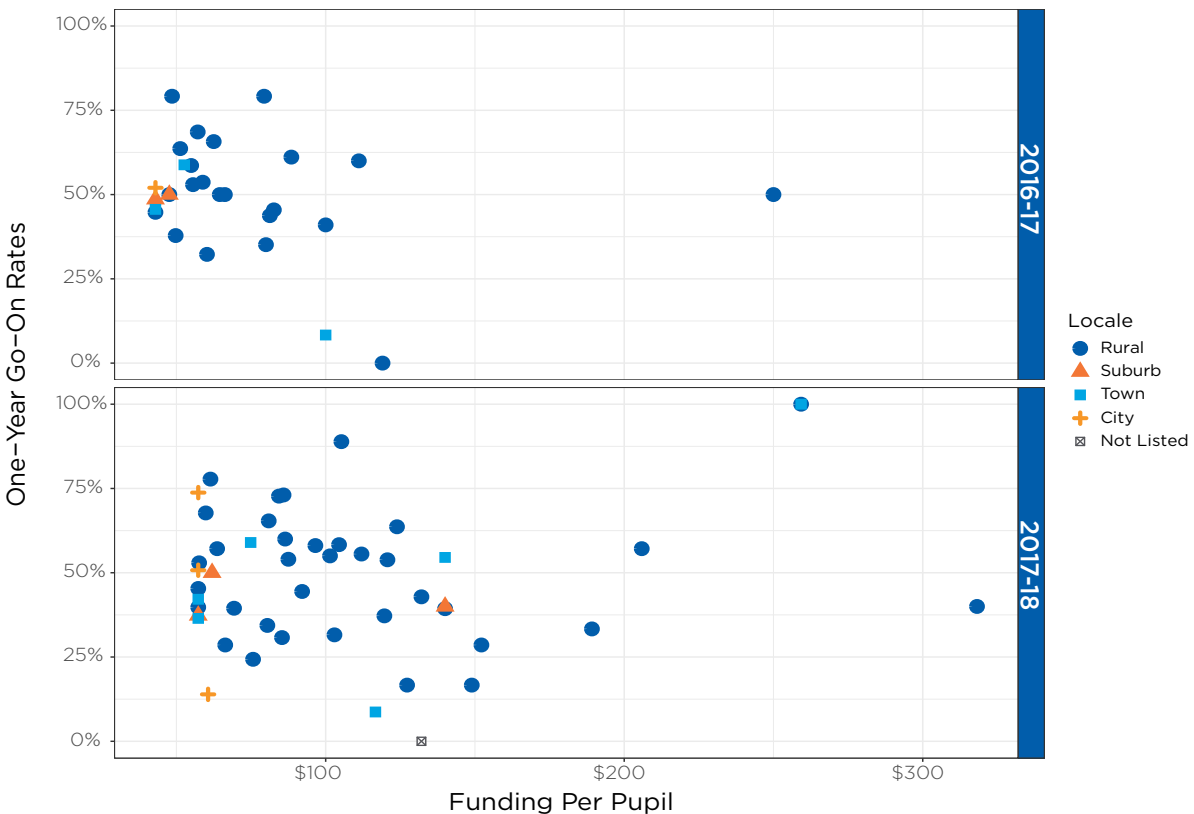
## Funding per Pupil and Total Funding

Funding, for the most part, is distributed to LEAs in relation to the number of students enrolled in grades 8-12. There was not an identifiable pattern between LEA funding per pupil and go-on rates. However, when looking at total funding, go-on rates did vary in each of the two years.

**FIGURE 11:** GO ON RATE BY FUNDING PER PUPIL AND LOCALE

Note, total Program funding increased overall in 2017-18 from the previous year, as indicated in Figure 12.

**FIGURE 12: GO ON RATE BY LEA TOTAL FUNDING AND COHORT SIZE**
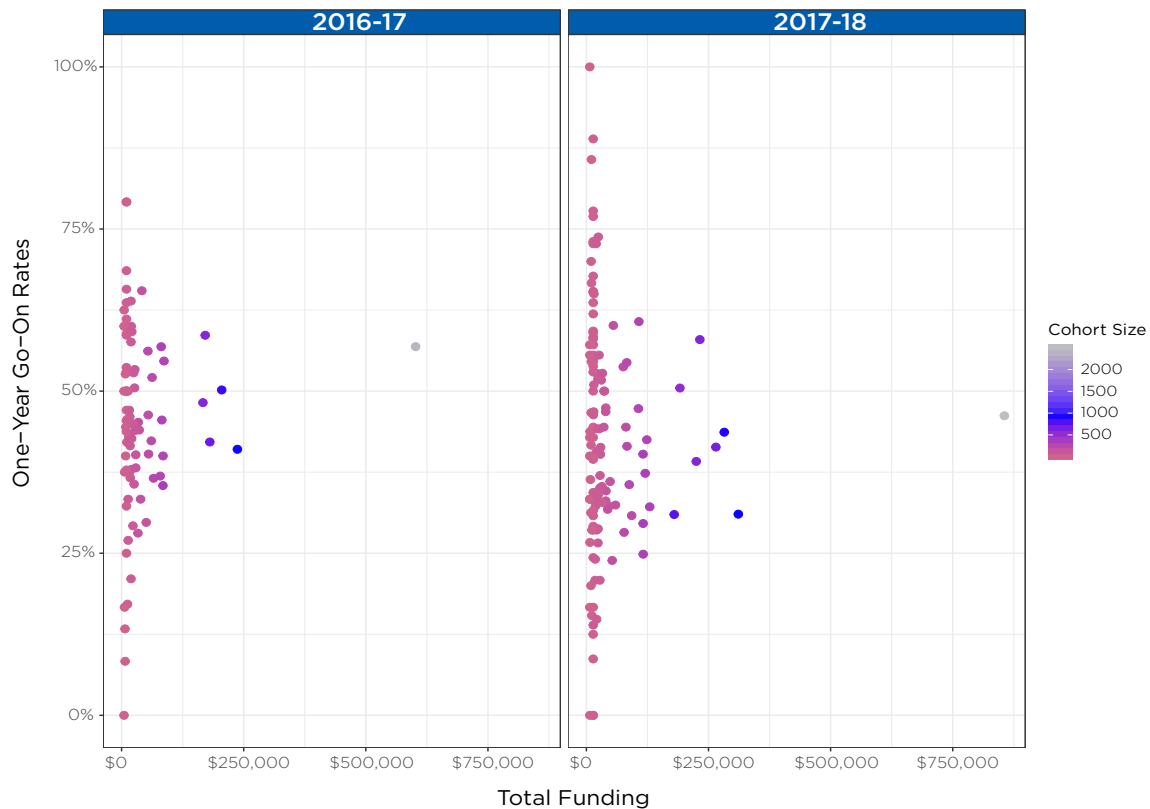


## Number of Students with Technical Certificates and Associates Degrees

LEAs are required to report the number of students earning college certificates and associates degrees. In all, 122 (86%) LEAs reported this metric and 20 (14%) did not. Of the LEAs that reported this measure, 67 (47%) indicated having zero students earning technical certificates or associates degrees. The annual college and career advising plans showed evidence of inconsistent understanding among LEAs about what qualifies as a technical certificate. Therefore, LEAs would benefit from more detailed information about reporting technical certificates and associates degrees.

## Additional Metric

LEAs are required to choose at least one additional measure relating to college and career readiness for their annual report to OSBE. However, as with the other metrics, additional metrics were also underreported in the annual Plans. In the 2017-18 plans, 75 (53%) LEAs reported at least one additional metric, while 67 (47%) LEAs did not have this required data. When reported, the most common examples of these metrics include Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or college application completion rates, SAT/ACT results and dual credit and AP course enrollment. Several LEAs include information about military enlistment or students serving religious missions, both of which may impact go-on rates for some schools. Due to the many differences in the optional metrics reported, these metrics cannot be effectively compared at this time. That said, over time this reporting could also be streamlined and potentially provide insight into additional metrics that should be required for LEA Plans.

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# ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

The College and Career Advising Program recognizes the importance of planning for students' future and engaging students in this effort as early as eighth grade. Thus, this five-year intervention for eighth grade though twelfth grade students cannot completely be evaluated until the first cohort experiencing the full intervention graduates from high school in 2021. Even so, this initial analysis provides insight into what can be done to ensure a thorough evaluation can be conducted in the future.

Although LEAs are required to submit College and Career Advising and Mentoring Plans, Plans submitted have been incomplete and reporting has been inconsistent. Enabling the requirement of clearer reporting standards and streamlined data collection could ensure more complete and accurate Plans. This could include requiring utilization of a standardized online form for all LEAs, with incomplete or inaccurate forms not accepted for submission. Online forms could also provide imbedded definitions for LEAs regarding how to calculate metrics, which have historically been misreported. In addition, providing a platform for collecting contextual, qualitative feedback from LEAs in the future could help to better understand individual LEA approaches and impact on students. This qualitative feedback would not necessarily need to be required; rather it would help provide more context to the complications LEAs face in Plan design, implementation and reporting.

Metrics necessary to measure the intended outcomes of the program are not only inconsistently reported among LEAs, they are also insufficient. Go-on rates, the primary measure of success at this point in time, are ineffective in measuring all aspects of student success intended by the Program. For instance, it is nearly impossible to measure program effectiveness with regard to the career readiness aspect of this program, as there is currently no reliable way of indicating career outcomes for students. The same goes for students enlisting in the military or choosing to go on a religious mission - there is currently no way of measuring which students are choosing such paths. Therefore, establishing a collection of success measures that reflect a broad range of postsecondary opportunities, including but not limited to college enrollment, is necessary for future evaluation.

In regard to funding distribution, requiring LEAs to submit estimated budgets and actual expenditures could increase LEA accountability and allow for future evaluators to fully analyze use of funds and, therefore, funding impact on student success. In addition, the data analyzed in this report, as well as other research into student success, suggests that not all students experience college and career readiness at the same rates. Students with learning disabilities, English language-learners, racial and ethnic minorities and economically disadvantaged students are all at a higher risk of not going on to postsecondary education or planning for a career path after high school. Program funds are currently being distributed without consideration for these factors. Case in point, national research[1] indicates that students who were likely to go-on to college (such as those with college graduates in their immediate family) are more likely to take advantage of college and career advising than students who are less likely to go to college (such as those without parents who have graduated from college). Thus, by directing support to

**1**　　　Venezia, A., & Kirst, M. W. (2005). Inequitable Opportunities: How Current Education Systems and Policies Undermine the Chances for Student Persistence and Success in College. Educational Policy, 19(2), 283–307.

students who more likely need it, rates of college and career readiness could rise across the state.

Investing in the future of Idaho's students is necessary for their success and the success of the state. As the College and Career Advising and Mentoring Program progresses, ongoing evaluation and data collection is essential to better understand the effects this Program is having on Idaho students, what can be done to create a more successful Program and how the Program can best complement other statewide efforts seeking to support similar outcomes.

# APPENDIX A:
# ABBREVIATIONS & DEFINITIONS

## ABBREVIATIONS

**CIP:** Continuous Improvement Plan

**IEP:** Individualized Education Plan

**LEA:** Local Educational Agency

**LEP:** Limited English Proficiency

**NCES:** National Center for Education Statistics

**OSBE:** Idaho Office of the State Board of Education

**Plan:** College and Career Advising and Student Mentoring Plan

**Program:** College and Career Advising and Student Mentor Program

**SDE:** Idaho State Department of Education

## DEFINITIONS

**Go-on Rate:** Percentage of students who graduate from high school and then go on to some form of postsecondary education

**NCES Locales:**

- City is defined as "territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city"
- Suburb is defined as "territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area"
- Town is "territory inside an urban cluster"
- Rural is defined as "Census-defined rural territory"

NCES further subdivides these categories—City and Suburb are subdivided by Large, Midsize and Small, while Town and Rural are subdivided by Fringe, Distant and Remote. To simplify analysis, only the four overriding categories were used.

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