

2020

College & Career Advising & Mentoring Program Evaluation 2020

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COLLEGE & CAREER
ADVISING & MENTORING
PROGRAM **EVALUATION**
2020



BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY
IDAHO POLICY INSTITUTE

COLLEGE & CAREER ADVISING & MENTORING PROGRAM EVALUATION 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Idaho's College and Career Advising and Mentoring Program (Program) is intended to support Idaho's Local Educational Agencies' (LEAs) efforts to support Idaho students' preparation for college and career readiness. In 2019, for the second consecutive year, the Idaho Legislature requested an independent evaluation of the Program. This evaluation, authored by the Idaho Policy Institute (IPI), builds on IPI's 2019 report and considers the Program's design, use of funds, effectiveness and other relevant metrics. It also presents an analysis of the Program's internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as its external opportunities and threats (also known as a SWOT analysis).

DESIGN

Efforts by the Idaho Office of the State Board of Education (OSBE) to streamline and improve the LEA College and Career Advising Plan (the Plan) submission process resulted in a higher quality of Plans submitted in 2019. However, not all Plans are up to date and some Plans do not include direct college and career counselor and advisor input. In addition, reporting requirements limit LEA's ability to fully represent their use of funds, suggesting need for more contextual and purposeful reporting measures.

USE OF FUNDS

It is difficult to track or confirm LEA use of funds or determine funding impact on program effectiveness, as statute does not require LEAs to submit budgets with their plans nor provide expense reports. The funding allocation formula itself relies on student population and does not account for student or school need, which may hinder the Program's ability to affect outcomes for students with the most potential for improvement. In addition, funding distribution does not incentivize goal attainment which may impede Program progress.

EFFECTIVENESS

The current use of college go-on rates to measure Program success does not account for career readiness or success in college, preventing a comprehensive analysis of Program outcomes. This Program was also created alongside other statewide programs intended to improve post-high school outcomes, making it difficult to separate effects of individual programs. For example, there is significant overlap in many LEAs between College and Career Advising and Student Mentoring Programs and the Advanced Opportunities Programs.



STRENGTHS

The Program raises student awareness of college and career options and increases student access to college and career mentors and advisors. It also offers valuable resources for advisors which enables them to more effectively serve students.

WEAKNESSES

Improved data collection efforts from LEAs can lead to more accountability and transparency. The Program funding distribution formula is population based and does not link to LEA needs and goals.

OPPORTUNITIES

Continued training opportunities can help reduce the burden on advisors. The development of a stronger reporting tool for school counselors and advisors to share best practices could lead to more informed LEA decision-making throughout the state, while also providing valuable context to LEA reports. Establishing a broader range of postsecondary success metrics will enable the Program to take a more comprehensive view of student achievement.

THREATS

Perception of the Program's effectiveness has been shaped by incomplete data. Uncertainty about future program funding has led to apprehension among school advisors. Challenges related to credit accessibility could also threaten the Program's success. Finally, the Program's limited state-level resources threaten its long-term sustainability.

The Program is designed as a five-year intervention for eighth grade through twelfth grade students and therefore cannot be completely evaluated until the first full cohort graduates from high school in 2021. However, data presented in this evaluation can be utilized to strengthen the program. In addition, ongoing data collection and evaluation efforts will provide further insight into how the Program affects Idaho students.



BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

In 2016, the Idaho Legislature amended statute to create and fund the current College and Career Advisors and Student Mentors Program (Program). The Program's intention is to "provide all students with an early opportunity to identify academic strengths, areas in need of improvement and areas of interest for the purpose of making informed choices and setting postsecondary education and career goals. The focus of college and career planning is to help students acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve academic success and to be college and career ready upon high school graduation."¹

The Program requires school districts and charter schools (also known as Local Educational Agencies or LEAs) to develop a College and Career Advising and Student Mentoring Plan (Plan) to give students 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 a Plan to the Office of the State Board of Education (OSBE). The Plan must 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
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.

The initial stages of evaluation demonstrate that the above required metrics function as effective measures for LEAs and OSBE to report and track the success of the postsecondary education readiness aspect of the Program. However, there is not a clear and consistent metric identified to measure how the Program is impacting students' career readiness or student success after entering college.

LIMITATIONS

There are a number of limitations that prevent a comprehensive evaluation of the Program:

1. Many of the LEAs submitted incomplete plans.
2. Some LEAs did not submit the required plans for each Program year.
3. LEAs define 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. Plans do not require all 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.
7. There is currently no data that adequately measures students' readiness to succeed in college once accepted.
8. Different LEAs chose different additional metrics, which prevents these metrics from being used to compare school effectiveness since data is not available for all LEAs.

Improving on these limitations in the future will allow for more comprehensive evaluations. What follows in this report is a preliminary look at data currently available. A discussion of the methodology and data sources is located in Appendix B.

ELEMENTS OF EVALUATION

PROGRAM DESIGN

The Program allows for flexibility in choice and application among LEAs. LEAs choose a program from a list of interventions set forth in statute based on what works best for the particular LEA's funding and school environment.³ Plans must contain the required measures, including an additional measure that LEAs choose to best represent progress in helping prepare students for college and career readiness.

LEA plans submitted for the 2018-19 school year were more uniform than in previous years. This may be in response to the more streamlined templates that OSBE offered in the past year. A majority of LEAs used the Plan template provided by OSBE, with a smaller percentage using the updated Plan templates specifically provided in 2019.

Some interviewees felt the templates were still difficult to use, but also expressed appreciation for support provided by the OSBE's College and Career Advising Program Manager.

In interviews, school counselors and advisors who participated in the development of their districts' Plans expressed support for accountability and reporting requirements, but also expressed frustration with the data required in the Plans. Some interviewees felt that requiring go-on data in the Plans was redundant, as go-on data is already available to the State through other channels.

A number of interviewees also felt the Plans do not go far enough in encouraging accountability. One interviewee expressed a desire "not for fewer hoops, but for better

hoops” to jump through in writing Plans. Other interviewees also felt unable to make a fair case for their use of Program money because measures such as face-to-face student interactions, campus visits and parent nights are not represented in their reports. LEAs similarly have difficulty reporting relative improvement over past performance.

These comments reflect an overarching concern that LEAs and their counselors and advisors are being left out of a larger conversation about what college and career advising and mentoring should look like, and how best practices should be reported and rewarded. This issue could be addressed with an engaged reporting tool that would help LEAs to better communicate their efforts and to share best practices.

Finally, the LEA representatives writing the Plans may not be the same people implementing the Plans (a fact supported by multiple interviews). Without engagement of the staff carrying out the Plan and accurate reporting of use of funds, it is difficult to determine if LEAs actually follow the programs outlined in their Plans.

USE OF FUNDS

In 2016, the Legislature appropriated an initial \$2.5 million to the Program. Funding increased to \$9 million in 2018. 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 pro rata distribution based on students enrolled in grades 8-12 (whichever is greater). 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 enrollment numbers, 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 make such significant changes.

Additional well-trained employees, such as counselors or peer mentors, may contribute to higher student success by lowering counselor/mentor-to-student ratios and creating a better chance for students in need to receive specialized, one-on-one assistance. Interviewees commonly mentioned that hiring extra staff with Program funds allows them more time for face-to-face interaction with students, as well as more time to research post-high school options and best practices for serving students.

State agencies are unable to effectively track Program funds because LEAs are not statutorily required to submit budgets. For example, in fiscal year 2019, only 10 percent (15 of 151) of LEAs reported an estimated budget with their Plans. This is a 62 percentage point decrease from fiscal year 2018. There is currently no way to measure actual expenditures either, as again this is not something LEAs are statutorily required to report. Requiring both proposed budgets and past-year expenditures is necessary to enable tracking of Program funds in the future. Furthermore, LEAs receive funding from the state whether or not a Plan is submitted.

LEAs are also not currently required to meet the performance benchmarks outlined in their Plans, as these goals are not tied to funding. There is little incentive for LEAs to set or achieve impactful goals. At the same time, limitations in the reporting requirements may make it more difficult for LEAs to demonstrate progress as it relates to their unique

challenges and opportunities. These issues represent areas for overall discussion and programmatic improvement.

Given the limitations of the data available 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 the impact of funding on program effectiveness.

PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

This Program is 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. Measuring the true effectiveness of this Program requires a cohort of students 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. Although go-on data records if students go to college or not, there is no accurate or reliable way for state agencies to measure where students are choosing to go after high school. It is especially difficult to measure apprenticeships, non-credit workforce training and proprietary career schools, which are also not represented in the go-on data.

Interviewees indicated that college and career counseling and advising may be making an impact on the number of scholarships that students are receiving, as well as the likelihood that students will stay in college, rather than dropping out before graduating. Both of these points warrant future investigation when data becomes available.

Idaho is engaging in a variety of efforts to increase college enrollment rates. Other programs include the Advanced Opportunities Program, Direct Admissions and Apply Idaho, which focus specifically on improving student go-on rates. In addition, some LEAs had preexisting college readiness programs, including federally funded Near Peer, GEAR UP or TRIO programs. Go-on data is likely impacted by these other programs, making it difficult to isolate the direct impact of the Program on go-on rates.

Furthermore, go-on rates alone do not account for the success of students whose goals are not college oriented, nor do they measure student success within college. Future data collection should account for various opportunities for Idaho's high school graduates, including college, trade schools, jobs and military or religious service, among others. Evaluation of this Program would also benefit from data on high school graduate preparedness, including SAT/ACT scores and GPAs.

Increased access to metrics that track students following career paths outside of college, and that track students as they progress through college, would enable better evaluation of the overall effectiveness of this Program. OSBE indicated that these data will become increasingly available in the future.

REQUIRED METRICS

As previously discussed, LEA Plans are required to report which program(s) are being used. Three mandatory metrics are also required, as well as one additional LEA selected metric. These data are inconsistently reported, as shown in Table 1. However, go-on rates and additional metrics were reported significantly more often than in fiscal year 2018.

TABLE 1: LEA METRIC REPORTING COMPLETION

Required Metric	% LEAs Reporting (FY 2018)	% LEAs Reporting (FY 2019)
Percent of High School Plans Reviewed	79%	79%
Go-On Rates	50%	78%
Number of Certificates and Associate Degrees	86%	78%
Additional Metric	53%	83%

PERCENT OF HIGH SCHOOL LEARNING PLANS REVIEWED

Individualized high school learning plans help all students learn about postsecondary opportunities and make choices early in high school that 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 themselves, 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 that school personnel have reviewed with individual students. This information is self-reported by LEAs. However, there is currently no way for state agencies to ensure all student plans are thoroughly reviewed each year. The majority of LEAs reported reviewing 100 percent of student plans. Specifically, 105 (69.5%) LEAs reported reviewing 100 percent of plans, while 14 (9.3%) reported reviewing less than that. Finally, 32 (22.5%) did not report this information. These numbers are similar to previous years.

GO-ON RATES

LEAs are required in their annual Plans to report the number and percent of graduating students that enrolled in postsecondary education for both the first and second year after graduation. In fiscal year 2019, 103 (68.2%) LEAs reported all required go-on information. 17 (11.3%) partially reported the required go-on information and 31 (20.5%) did not report any go-on information. This is an improvement over previous years, but is still not as reliable as student-level data, making it difficult to compare LEA goals with student outcomes.

NUMBER OF STUDENTS WITH TECHNICAL CERTIFICATES AND ASSOCIATE DEGREES

LEAs are required to report the number of students earning technical certificates and associates degrees. In the reports submitted for the 2018-19 school year, 117 (77.5%) LEAs reported this metric and 34 (22.5%) did not. Of the LEAs that reported this measure, 52 (44%) 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 associate degrees.

ADDITIONAL METRICS

LEAs are required to choose at least one additional measure relating to college and career readiness for their annual report to OSBE. As with the other metrics, additional metrics are somewhat underreported in the annual Plans. In the 2018-19 plans, 125 (82.8%) LEAs reported at least one additional metric, while 26 (17.2%) did not. However, this is a 30 percentage point improvement over additional metric reporting in the 2017-18 Plans.

When reported, the most common metrics include:

1. Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or college application completion rates
2. SAT/ACT results
3. Dual credit and AP course enrollment

Due to the many differences in the optional metrics reported, these metrics cannot be effectively compared at this time. That said, if reporting is streamlined over time and information on additional metrics becomes a required component for LEA Plans, there would be great opportunity for further insight on Program effectiveness.

SCHOOL PROGRAM CHOICE

A summary of the program data collected from the 2018-19 Plans submitted by LEAs is provided in Table 2. Significantly more LEAs chose hybrid plans, or combinations of plans, in fiscal year 2019 than in fiscal year 2018. Interviewees explained that the hybrid plan is popular because it allows for more flexibility and for a combination of the strengths of multiple program types.

PROGRAM CHOICE BY FUNDING

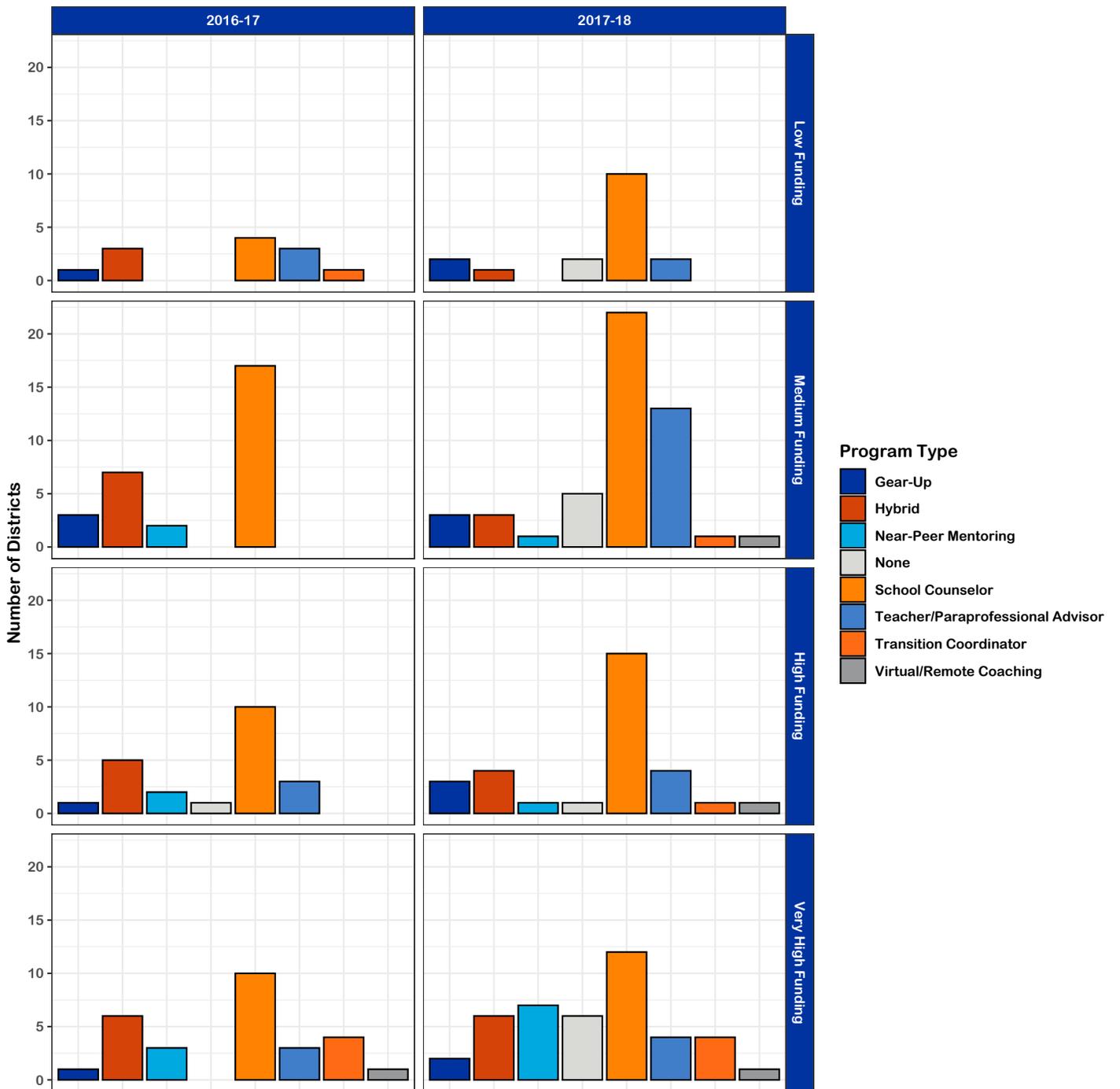
As mentioned, the overall amount of funding LEAs receive for the Program may impact their ability to choose specific types of programs to implement. To measure if program choice is related to funding, IPI analysis divided overall LEA funding into quartiles, with “Low Funding” representing the bottom 25 percent of funding numbers and “Very High Funding” representing the top 25 percent of funding numbers.⁴ Program choices varied across funding types and years, as illustrated in Figure 1. Regardless of funding amount, school counselor was consistently 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, the future analysis could look at the specific use of funds across programs.

TABLE 2: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF SCHOOL PROGRAM CHOICE

Type of Program	Description	% of Total (FY2018)	% of Total (FY2019)
Counselor	College/Career prep training for current or new hired professional	43%	24%
Teacher and/or Paraprofessional	College/Career prep training for a current staff/faculty	16%	5%
Near Peer/College Student Mentors	Specially-trained mentor hired specifically to help students prepare for College/Career	6%	7%
Virtual Coach or Mentor	College/Career readiness-trained mentor available via the internet	2%	0%
Gear Up	Federally funded program focused on early planning/strategies for college readiness	8%	2%
Transition Coordinator	Employee of a college/university that goes to high schools to help prepare students	4%	3%
Student Ambassadors		0%	0%
Hybrid	LEA with two or more approaches	20%	56%
No Plan	LEA did not submit plan any year	1%	4%

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.

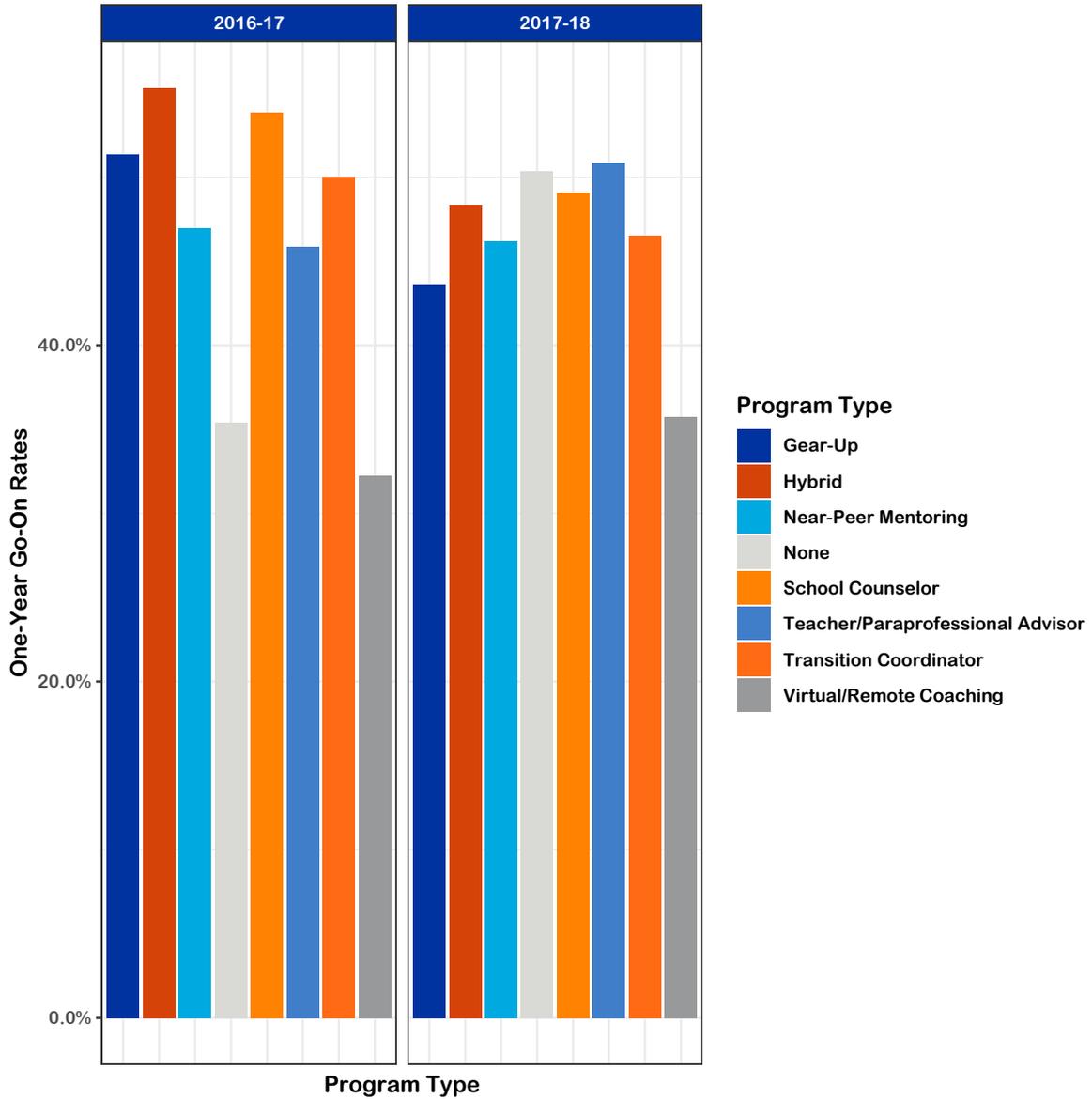
FIGURE 1: PROGRAM TYPE BY DISTRICT FUNDING CATEGORY



PROGRAM TYPE

Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between program type and go-on rates. Factors other than program type may be causing the variance in go-on rates. Go-on rates for less common program types, such as those used by only a small number of LEAs, are more likely to be affected by small variations in the data. In addition, as the Program is new, there are not enough years of data to draw any cause and effect relationships.

FIGURE 2: GO-ON RATE BY PROGRAM TYPE



SWOT ANALYSIS

Analyzing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of a program offers insight into its positive and negative aspects internally (strengths and weaknesses) as well as externally (opportunities and threats). This analysis of the Program was informed by interviews of counselors and advisors, and secondary analysis of data provided by OSBE.

Each SWOT section analyzing the Program relates to other sections of the evaluation. For instance, a weakness or threat can also represent an opportunity to improve the Program. Internally, some of the Program’s strengths include awareness, access and resources. Weaknesses include institutional support, accountability and transparency and data. Externally, opportunities relate to training, reducing burden and other support. Threats to the Program are perception and support, funding and credit accessibility.



STRENGTHS

1. RAISING AWARENESS

STUDENT OPTIONS: Advisors help students recognize the benefits and possibility of continuing their education while also supporting students through the entire process (including weighing options for funding). Some students indicated to their college and career advisors that they would not have attended college without their information and guidance.

FOCUS ON CAREER & TECHNICAL EDUCATION (CTE): For students who are not interested in the traditional college path, counselors and advisors recommend CTE, showing students the earnings boost that comes with just a few extra years of school. Students are made aware of apprenticeship programs and technical certifications. Dual credit courses allow students to enter technical programs with some or all of their core college credits.

GO-ON CULTURE: Many school districts emphasize a postsecondary culture where students are made aware of opportunities beyond the traditional options of entering four-year college, military or the workforce. In rural districts, advisors use the Program to challenge assumptions that education is unnecessary beyond high school. Advisors in these areas try to create a spark by discussing applicable majors in college, such as agricultural science.

INTENTIONAL LEARNING PLANS: College and career advising brings more relevance to the curriculum. Advisors engage in more meaningful class planning tailored to help students prepare for the future. Learning plans are more dynamic as students are given the opportunity to revisit and change it every year. Advisors help students identify career pathways and connect interests to classes within a particular field.

2. INCREASING ACCESS

OUTREACH TO DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS: College and career advising is especially helpful for groups that are most likely to be unaware of go-on options, including first-generation, economically disadvantaged and minority students. Counselors work closely with English-Language Learner (ELL) coordinators to ensure that all students are receiving go-on advice.

EXPANDING SERVICES TO ADDITIONAL GRADES: The increase in funding allowed many counselors and advisors to spend more time with students in younger grades, starting the conversation about postsecondary options earlier and allowing younger students to take advantage of learning plans. Some schools also utilize the recent increase in funding to offer the PSAT free-of-cost to underclassmen.

INDIVIDUALIZED ATTENTION: Each student requires individual attention from counselors to personalize learning plans and tailor course schedules. The Advanced Opportunities Program also gives high school counselors and advisors the opportunity to personalize each student's curriculum based on their future plans.

EXPANDING COURSE OPTIONS: Schools add core classes to give students access to more college credits. As a result, students with college credit have more confidence that they can succeed at the college level.

3. RESOURCES

ADDING STAFF: Many schools used the additional funding to add another counselor or advisor. This allows schools to spend more one-on-one time with students and focus specifically on college and career advising, while freeing other staff members to focus more on social and emotional counseling. Many districts selected the hybrid model in their College and Career Advising Plans to give flexibility to hire who they need.

EVENTS & TRIPS: Schools hold college-minded events such as financial aid night, college application week and higher education day, and also bring in military speakers. Advisors also take students to college campuses, college fairs and trade centers.

ONLINE RESOURCES: Counselors and advisors find it helpful to communicate with peers to learn from their experiences. The Idaho State Board of Education's Next Steps website, an online tool for advisors, students and parents, is widely seen as a useful resource. Advisors also help students find outside website resources.



1. INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

LOW PAY FOR COLLEGE & CAREER ADVISORS: There is a need for more financial support to prevent turnover, particularly as college and career advisors face an increasingly heavy workload. Advisors often have as much responsibility as other staff members, but do not believe they are paid adequately given the challenges associated with the workload. At some schools, advisors report only being paid half as much as counselor salaries. Some interviewees expressed a desire to be compensated on a similar pay scale and career ladder as teachers. Advisors still recognize that morale and turnover have “tremendously improved” since the new funding was implemented.

LACK OF INSTITUTIONALIZED SUPPORT: Since the Program is not streamlined at the state level, some college and career advisors feel that learning on the job is an overwhelming process. The lack of coordination with other aspects of the state's education system also leads advisors to feel blindsided by certain student outreach efforts. For instance, counselors reported that the automatic acceptance letters sent to seniors can create complacency, leading students to spend less time preparing for college.

SHORT-TERM OBJECTIVES: Out of fear that Program funding will be reduced, funds may be directed to short-term goals rather than sustainable, long-term objectives. For instance, the Program may put too much pressure on recommending college without a full consideration of whether it is the appropriate path for each student. Advisors fear that some students, despite having dual credits, end up dropping out of college after losing interest or becoming overwhelmed by the challenge. Some rural students “just want to be home.” By emphasizing go-on rates over other metrics, the Program may be incentivizing schools to push students toward college regardless of their chances of succeeding.

2. ACCOUNTABILITY & TRANSPARENCY

LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY: Courses for college credit do not always reach the standard of a college course. Many students fulfill the prerequisites for higher level college classes but enter them unprepared for the level of difficulty. Although OSBE's policy states that students in dual credit courses should be held to postsecondary content and achievement standards, in practice the quality of courses differs between districts and schools, leading to varying levels of rigor and student preparation between the high schools that offer such courses.⁵

LACK OF TRANSPARENCY: Advisors want to be able to follow the Program's distribution of funding. Districts used to be required to report allocations, which they would like to see brought back. Some advisors reported having no access to dedicated college and career advising funds and were unable to see the distribution to determine if there would be any extra funding for supplies.

BUREAUCRATIC LIMITATIONS: Interviewees noted that the Program is diverse in nature and should not be treated as one-size-fits-all. Districts have to jump through several hoops to plan and submit the College and Career Advising Plan. Advisors and administrators occasionally have to seek out answers to create advising plans since the template is not intuitive. Some want fewer restrictions and more flexibility on what people in the position are allowed to do, such as restrictions on sources of funding and permitted expenses.

3. DATA COLLECTION

STUDENT PERFORMANCE DATA: Advisors want access to more detailed information on performance trends in order to better understand the Program's impact statewide and at the school-level. Access to better data would enable advisors to identify similar schools and contextualize their own school's progress in comparison to these schools, making it possible to identify programs and approaches that are working particularly well.

SCHOLARSHIP & FUNDING DATA: For schools that track financial aid data, advisors report a substantial increase in the amount of scholarships offered and accepted among the school's seniors, a direct consequence of the College and Career Advising Program. While an encouraging statistic, it is hard to contextualize the data without more systematic reporting from other school districts.

ADVISING PLAN METRICS: On college and career advising plans, districts are required to report metrics including go-on rate, percent of learning plans developed and reviewed and number of students graduating with technical certificates and associate's degrees. These self-reported metrics often differ from the official statistics reported by the state. Moreover, districts are required to submit an additional metric of their choosing, which leads to the reporting of arbitrary data, often incomparable between districts.



1. TRAINING

STREAMLINED TRAINING: Since counselors typically have more traditional academic training, such as a college education, many recognized the need for more professional development and hands-on experience related to CTE for them to effectively advertise and answer students' questions about career and technical education. Advisors could also use more top-down guidance, ensuring that advisors follow best practices.

INFORMATION SHARING: Advisors wanted more collaboration between schools to share best practices, success stories and lessons learned from mistakes. This could include mobilized training and face-to-face collaboration. Advisors are often part of the original drafting of their district's College and Career Advising Plan, but they are not always consulted by the district when the plan is being updated. Districts could be encouraged to seek out advisors' ground-level assessment in their own reporting requirements.

RESOURCES & FUNDING: While virtually every advisor perceives the College and Career Advising Program as beneficial, and the recent increase in funding as a step in the right direction, some advisors indicated a need for more staff members and resources to more fully prepare their students for life after graduation. Moreover, there is an opportunity to bridge the gap between already available resources and counselors and advisors who are either unaware of the resources or do not know how to use them.

2. REDUCING BURDEN

TIME BURDEN: Despite changes in the Program that have reduced the time burden of college and career advisors, the opportunity still exists to further alleviate the demands currently facing staff members. For instance, most advisors still have to find extra time to meet with all students one-on-one.

STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS: For schools offering dual credit courses, many have formed partnerships with higher education institutions. College and career advisors are largely responsible for seeking out potential partner institutions on their own. Each college and university has unique requirements for offering credit, which advisors are also responsible for sorting out. The state could coordinate with colleges to streamline the registration process. Advisors also indicated a desire for more standardization of how dual credits are applied when students enter college.

3. EXPANDING SUPPORT

TEST PREPARATION: Since the state allocates funds to make standardized tests available to students, it was recommended that the state also help students prepare for the tests. Some schools use the EdReady program to help students prepare for the SAT, a resource that could be made available to other schools or the state could create its own study program.

IMPROVING ONLINE RESOURCES: Although advisors generally appreciate the online resources currently available, such as Next Steps, there is a desire for more timeliness in when information is posted. An opportunity also exists to make Next Steps and career aptitude tests more accessible to students. While advisors offered specific suggestions for improving these resources, other advisors were not aware of all online tools, suggesting that staff members may need to be informed of available resources.



1. PERCEPTION & SUPPORT

DIFFICULTY CAPTURING PROGRESS: If perceptions of the Program's success are rooted in go-on rates, it may lead to misunderstandings about the progress of college and career advising. The Program is relatively new, so student performance data may not yet reflect the progress being made in college and career advising. The lack of complete data means advisors are left to guess whether more students are going to and succeeding in college. Schools with stagnant go-on rates may be perceived as unsuccessful in college and career preparation, but advising may be keeping more students in school who do attend, leading to fewer drop-outs later on.

DEPENDENCY ON ONE CHAMPION: School relationships with the College and Career Program Manager are positive, but a lack of centralized support prevents schools from accessing resources related to support, training and technical assistance. Schools may not always know the best point of contact for each specific problem they face.

2. FUNDING

LOSING PROGRAM FUNDING: Advisors fear the prospect that funding for the College and Career Advising Program could be reduced or eliminated. Some schools struggled with the possibility of ending advising services when they lost GEAR UP funding, but the introduction of the current Program enabled schools to preserve such services.

STUDENT CHALLENGES FUNDING COLLEGE: One of the most existential threats to students attending college is the cost of higher education. Advisors recognized the need for more scholarships for Idaho students, especially middle-of-the-road students who fail to qualify for need- or merit-based scholarships. Students who received funding frequently report to their advisors that they would not have been able to attend college without the scholarships and grants they received, funding that was made possible by the insight of their advisors.

3. CREDIT ACCESSIBILITY

TRANSFERRING CREDITS: Counselors reported challenges related to students being unable to transfer dual credits to out-of-state colleges, although the issue has become less prevalent. The challenge remains a threat since advisors have more difficulty convincing students to continue their education when they lose their head start on college credits.

TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS: Despite the availability of dual credit and AP courses through the Idaho Digital Learning Alliance (IDLA), rural districts still face a unique threat in finding enough qualified teachers to teach dual credit classes based on the requirements of higher education institutions. Such a barrier threatens students' ability to take college-level courses and in turn weakens college and career advisors' effectiveness in recommending go-on options.

GO-ON RATE ANALYSIS

Go-on rates are only a limited measure of student success in relation to college and career advising programs. However, trends in go-on rates point to some additional opportunities for programmatic consideration. The following trends draw from analysis conducted by OSBE, as well as analysis of student go-on data.⁶

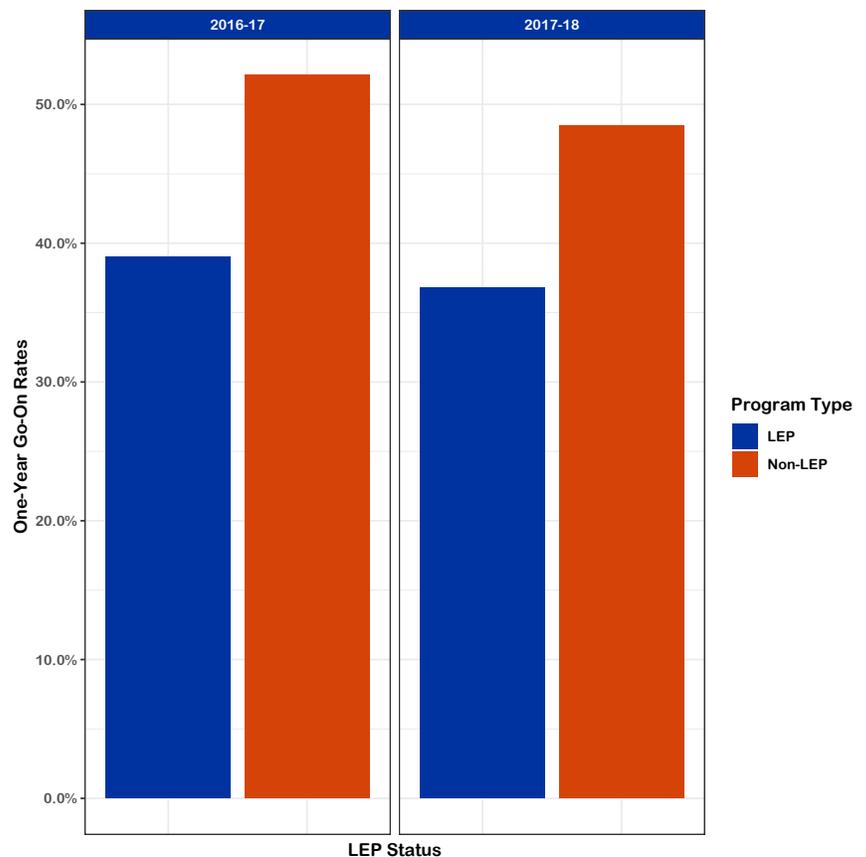
LOCALE

Schools in rural areas tended to see lower go-on rates than all other schools.⁷ Rural schools may lack access to tools and resources that are available to urban and suburban schools. This trend indicates that rural schools could benefit from additional Program support.

LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY (LEP) PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

English-learning (LEP) students may face greater challenges in keeping up with coursework, interacting with teachers and counselors and planning for their futures. There is a significant amount of data missing for this variable, but the data do 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 (see Figure 3).⁸ Additional support for schools with higher numbers of LEP students may help to close this gap by providing additional opportunities for one-on-one support.

FIGURE 3: GO-ON RATE BY LEP STATUS



ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE

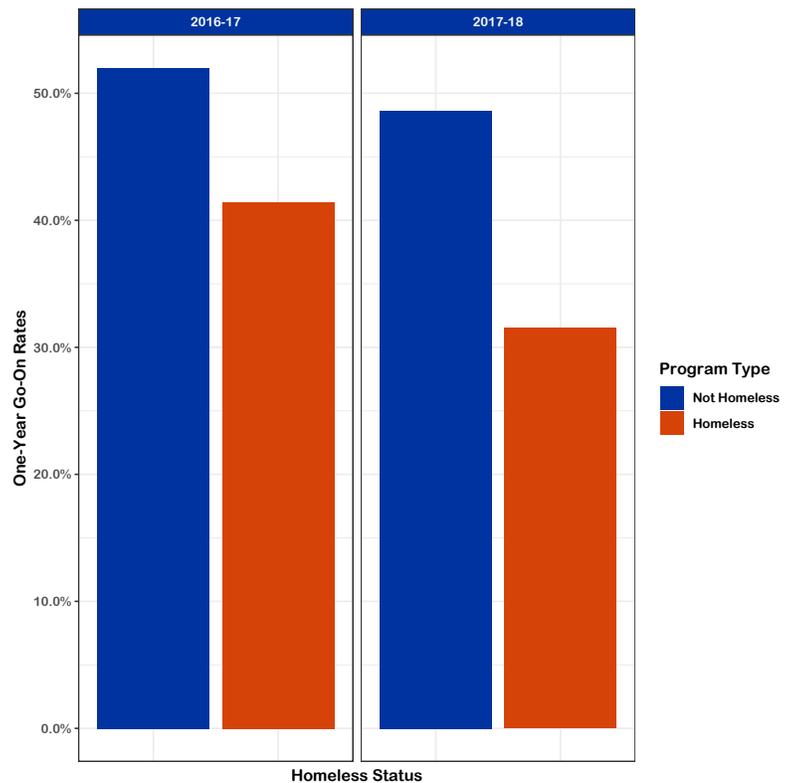
Economic disadvantage is known to affect student success both in and beyond high school. OSBE analysis shows that economically disadvantaged students are significantly less likely to go on than other students.⁹

Economically disadvantaged students may see funding as a challenge when planning for their careers. Providing additional support for schools with larger numbers of economically disadvantaged students may give counselors and advisors more time and resources to pursue additional funding options for these students.

HOUSING SECURITY

Some students face the challenge of housing insecurity. This may mean that they have no permanent homes of their own, may be moving from place to place or may be literally experiencing homelessness. This uncertainty leads to greater difficulty focusing in school and to poor attendance or behavioral issues. These issues negatively affect academic performance and make it more difficult for students to plan for what they want to do after high school graduation. Analysis, illustrated in Figure 4, demonstrates that students reported as homeless have significantly lower go-on rates than other students. These students could also benefit from additional financial and academic support.

FIGURE 4: GO-ON RATE BY HOUSING SECURITY



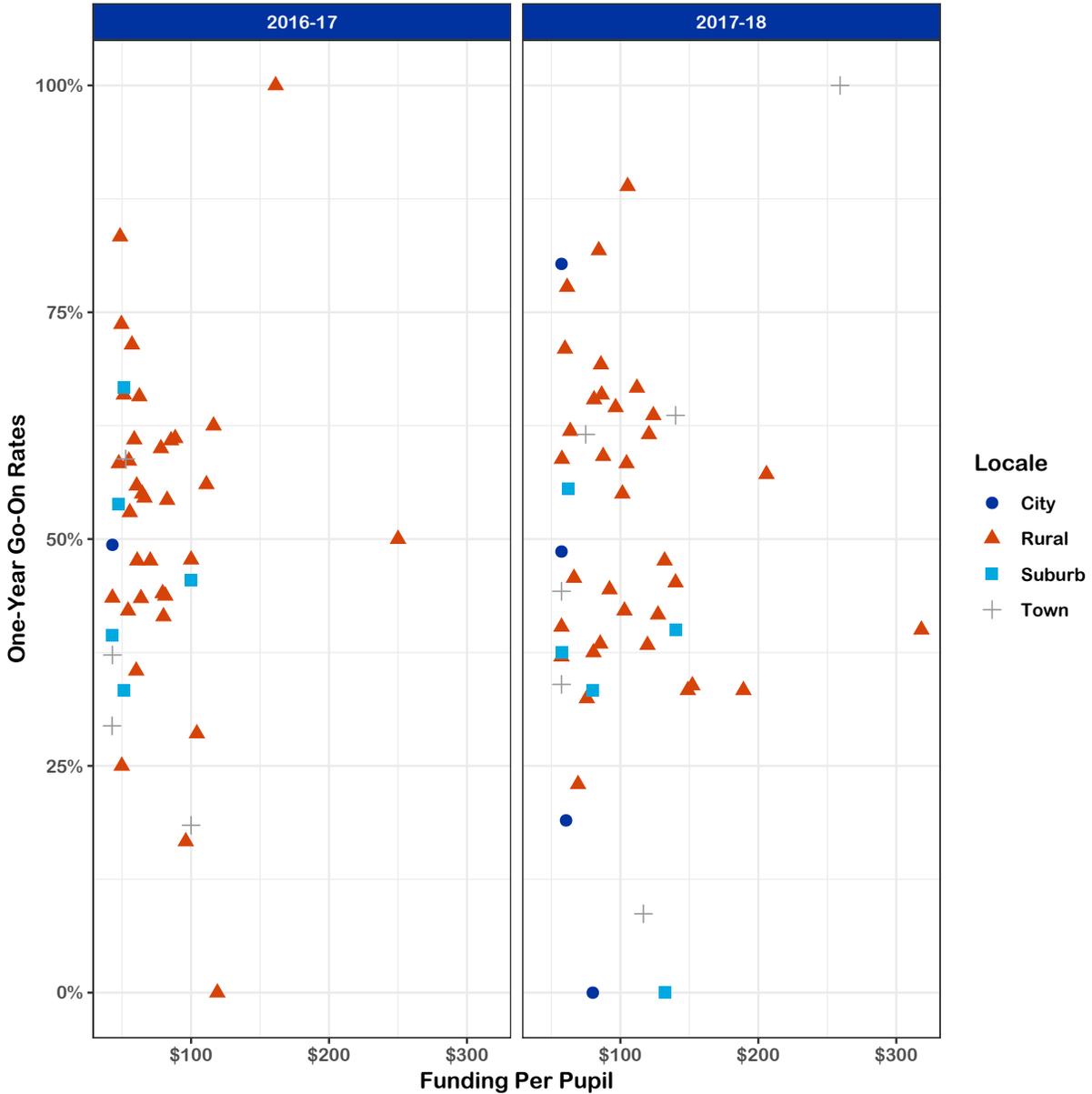
GENDER

IPI analysis finds that go-on rates across the state are consistently higher for female students than males. This may reflect a lack of data on non-traditional postsecondary options, such as apprenticeships and other non-credit career training. Additional data on non-traditional career options may help counselors and advisors better understand and address the career goals of high school males.

FUNDING PER PUPIL AND TOTAL FUNDING

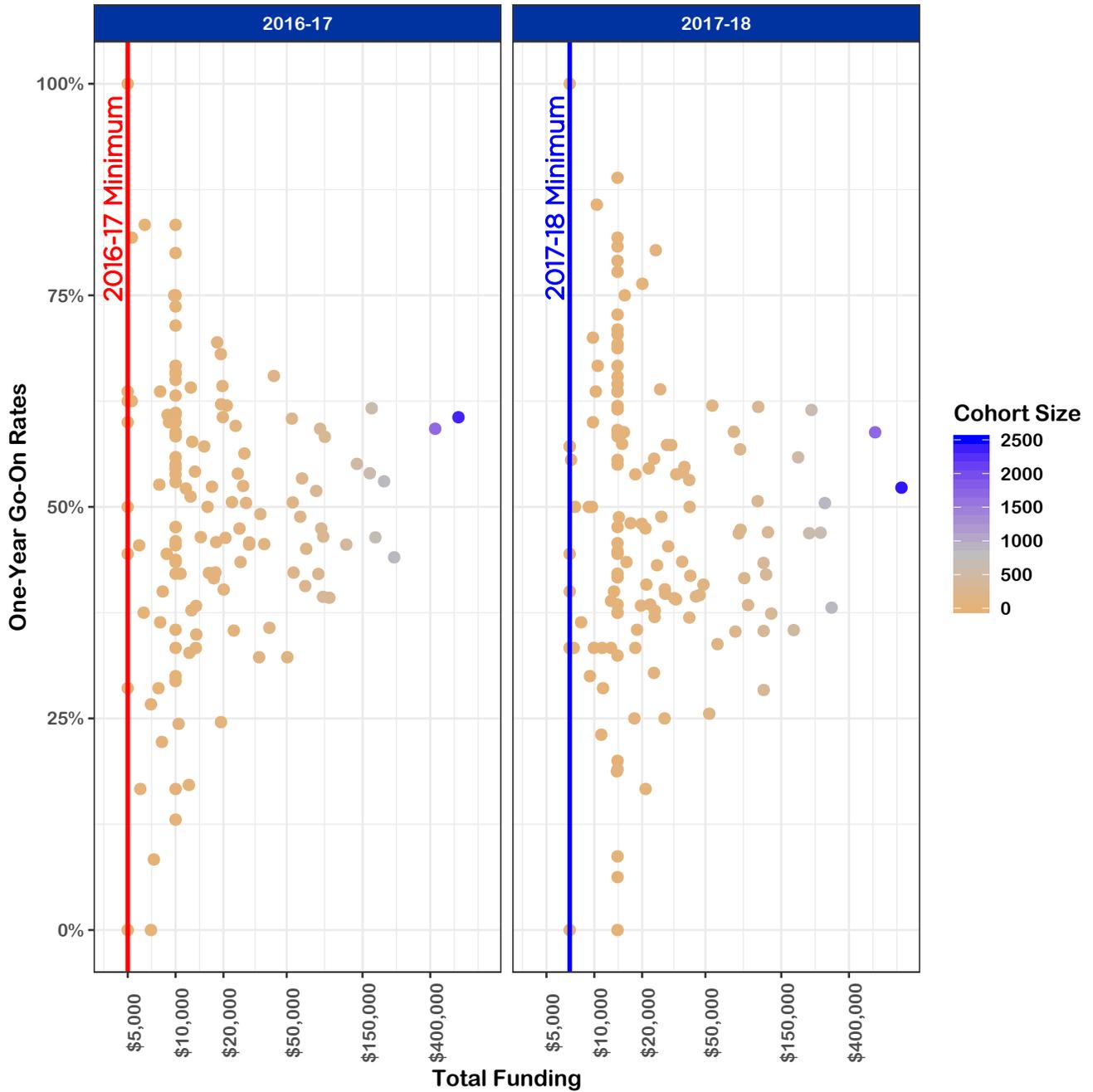
Funding, for the most part, is distributed to LEAs in relation to the number of students enrolled in grades 8-12. There is not an identifiable pattern between LEA funding per pupil and go-on rates (see Figure 5). Note that Program funding increased across the board in 2017-18.

FIGURE 5: GO-ON RATE BY FUNDING PER PUPIL AND LOCALE



There is also no identifiable pattern between total district funding and go-on rates (see Figure 6).

FIGURE 6: GO-ON RATE BY LEA TOTAL FUNDING AND COHORT SIZE



CONCLUSION

LEA College and Career Advising and Mentoring Plans submitted for fiscal year 2019 were generally of a higher quality than those submitted for previous years. Many of the school counselors and advisors interviewed felt that LEA Plans required unnecessary, redundant reporting and did not accurately capture their efforts. Providing a reporting tool for contextual feedback from LEAs in the future could help LEAs better advocate for their own approaches and the impacts they are having on students. This platform could also encourage the sharing of best practices between LEAs, enabling informed LEA decision-making throughout the state.

LEAs are not required to submit estimated budgets or actual expenditures, so it is difficult to measure LEA use of funds, or funding impact on student success. Program funds are also distributed without consideration for important differences in LEA and student need, which may hurt the Program's ability to impact student outcomes. Finally, LEAs are not incentivized to set or achieve impactful goals, as Plans are not tied to funding. These are areas for Program discussion and improvement.

LEA Plans focus heavily on go-on rates. However, go-on rates do not provide a comprehensive view of student success. It is difficult to measure career outcomes for students choosing alternative career options, such as military service and workforce training. Go-on rates also do not measure student success within college, such as scholarship awards and college completion. Establishing a broader range of postsecondary success metrics will strengthen future evaluations.

Interviews and secondary data analysis informed further analysis of the Program's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Internally, the Program raises student awareness of go-on options, increases student access and offers valuable resources for advisors, but it lacks adequate institutional support, accountability and transparency and data collection efforts. Externally, the Program could focus on improving training, reducing the burden on advisors and expanding support for advisors and students, while it faces challenges related to perception and support, program funding and credit accessibility.

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 best complements 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 Plans Submitted by LEAs

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.

APPENDIX B: METHODOLOGY

The data used to create this report were provided by OSBE. These 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 two school years (2016-17, 2017-18) were collected and combined into a single data set. 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 53,469 students in 139 LEAs.

OSBE also provided data on the amount of funding distributed to each LEA through the Program, as well as 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. Plans for the 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years were reviewed, as well as funding distribution data for the 2016-17 and 2017-18 school years. This information was entered into a dataset. School-level data were also collected from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

In addition to the collected data, IPI gathered contextual data by communicating regularly and conducting ongoing interviews with Program administrators as well as interviewing seven college and career counselors and advisors at schools across Idaho. Care was taken to ensure that educators from a variety of regions in Idaho would be represented in the interview sample, as well as educators from a variety of school sizes and types (charter and traditional). Interviewees were remarkably consistent in their responses, and Program administrators verified that themes identified in the interviews were commonly heard.

ENDNOTES

1 Idaho Code § 33-1212A

2 IDAPA 08.02.03.104.02.a provides: “No later than the end of Grade eight (8) each student shall develop parent-approved student learning plans for their high school and post-high school options. The learning plan shall be developed by students with the assistance of parents or guardians, and with advice and recommendation from school personnel. It shall be reviewed annually and may be revised at any time. The purpose of a parent-approved student learning plan is to outline a course of study and learning activities for students to become contributing members of society. A student learning plan describes, at a minimum, the list of courses and learning activities in which the student will engage while working toward meeting the state and school district’s or LEA’s graduation standards in preparation for postsecondary goals. The school district or LEA will have met its obligation for parental involvement if it makes a good faith effort to notify the parent or guardian of the responsibility for the development and approval of the learning plan. A learning plan will not be required if the parent or guardian requests, in writing, that no learning plan be developed.”

3 Idaho Code § 33-1212A(2)

4 Funding data for 2018-19 was not available at the time this report was written.

5 Idaho State Board of Education Governing Policies and Procedures; Section III, Y

6 Due to remaining inconsistencies and incomplete records in the LEA Plans, student-level cohort data provided by OSBE were used to analyze go-on rates, rather than rates reported in LEA plans. The data used in this analysis reflect one year go-on rates for the graduating classes of 2017 and 2018. Data for the 2019 graduating class was not yet available, thus some analysis remains the same as in IPI’s report for the previous year.

7 Idaho State Board of Education, 2019 Fact Book

8 Idaho schools group LEP students into a ten category classification system. For ease of analysis, these classifications were collapsed into two categories: LEP students (those in the program or still undergoing monitoring) and non-LEP students (those now fluent, screen out or not applicable).

9 Idaho State Board of Education, 2019 Fact Book

This report was prepared by Idaho Policy Institute at Boise State University and commissioned by the Idaho Office of the State Board of Education.

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