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# Harris County's College Advising Needs

By Irina Chukhray, M.A. and Esmeralda Sánchez Salazar, M.S.

**Research Report**  
for the Houston Independent School District



## Research Report

# Harris County's College Advising Needs

**T**his research report is a preliminary assessment of college advising needs in nine target school districts surrounding the Houston Independent School District: *Pasadena, Galena Park, Sheldon, Humble, Aldine, Cypress-Fairbanks, Spring Branch, Alief, and Katy ISD*. We present our findings based on publicly available information from district and state sources, data from state agencies, and additional information gathered from phone interviews with district personnel. We report three primary conclusions: (1) districts struggle with limited documentation and/or accessibility of college application and enrollment rates, (2) there is a strong need for increased post-secondary advising services and (3) there is a strong need for more equitable distribution of services across high school campuses.

# Executive Summary

- Economically disadvantaged districts display the highest college application rates (more than 75 percent) while more economically advantaged districts display the lowest rates (less than 50 percent) in Texas. Disproportionate rates are likely driven by out-of-state applications in more advantaged districts and overrepresentation in applications to two-year institutions among disadvantaged districts.
- Districts serving economically disadvantaged populations show higher rates of students enrolling in two-year institutions compared to four-year institutions.
- Districts struggle with limited documentation and accessibility to college application and enrollment rate data: most district staff cannot easily access NSC or ApplyTexas data despite district collection of the data.
- FAFSA completion rates across school districts are considerably low, especially in districts serving higher percentages of students classified as economically disadvantaged. On average, only about 29 percent of students classified as seniors completed a FAFSA application by the start of January 2017 with little variation across the target districts (completion ranged from 21 to 32 percent).
- High immigrant student populations that are not eligible for federal aid may be driving the low FAFSA completion numbers.
- On average, districts hold a ratio of one counselor (any type) to more than 300 students, compared to HISD's ratio of 1 counselor (any type) to 184 students.
- College-focused counselors are spread thin: only about half of the districts employ a college-focused counselor serving schools in some capacity.
- Economically disadvantaged districts utilize career-focused rather than college-focused staff to provide post-secondary guidance.
- A majority of the nine target districts do not have a department specifically focused on providing college advising.
- In some districts, a majority of high school campuses share at least one (regular) guidance counselor with another campus, adding an extra burden for counselors and likely hindering student ease of access to advising.
- Although third-party nonprofits and organizations provide auxiliary college advising aid to districts, this aid is limited and not equitably distributed.

# Background

**I**n the summer prior to the 2015–16 school year, the Houston Independent School District (Houston ISD from here on) implemented a new district-wide college advising program.<sup>1</sup> Before the program’s implementation, many schools in the district had little or no access to individuals whose sole purpose was to provide college advising. Previously, students seeking college advice could meet with school guidance counselors. However, guidance counselors balance heavy caseloads along with other non-advising responsibilities and are generally not trained or have limited training in college advising (Corwin et al. 2004; Woods and Domina 2014). The new advising program places advisers at each high school campus to focus solely on college and financial aid advising.

Houston ISD serves a student population that is largely minority, first-generation,<sup>2</sup> and low-income. Students who are racial and ethnic minorities, first generation, and low-income are more likely to lack access to college information than their advantaged counterparts (Holland 2015). Because students classified as economically disadvantaged tend to rely on their high school for college information, college advisers play a key role in guiding students’ post-high school trajectory (Bell, Rowan-Kenyon, and Perna 2009; Bryan et al. 2011; Hill, Bregman, and Andrade 2015; Holland 2015; Lareau 2011; Weis, Cipollone, and Jenkins 2014). Several Harris County districts mirror Houston ISD in that they also serve a large proportion of students from high-need communities that could benefit from college advising.

Previously, the Houston Education Research Consortium (HERC) produced an assessment of Houston ISD’s new college advising program. Interviewed student and adviser participants shared the multiple benefits and impacts of the new advising program (see [Bancroft and Chukhray 2016](#)). Subsequently, HERC was asked to gather information on college advising needs in surrounding Harris County school districts. The nine target districts chosen for the needs assessment include *Pasadena, Galena Park, Sheldon, Humble, Aldine, Cypress-Fairbanks, Spring Branch, Alief, and Katy ISD*, as well as *Houston ISD* for comparison. In this report, we present findings related to advising services of the target Harris County school districts in the 2016–17 academic school year.

<sup>1</sup> A generous grant from the Houston Endowment to Houston ISD made the advising program possible. Houston ISD also matched the funds.

<sup>2</sup> Students who are the first in their family to attend a four-year college or university.

# Data and Methods

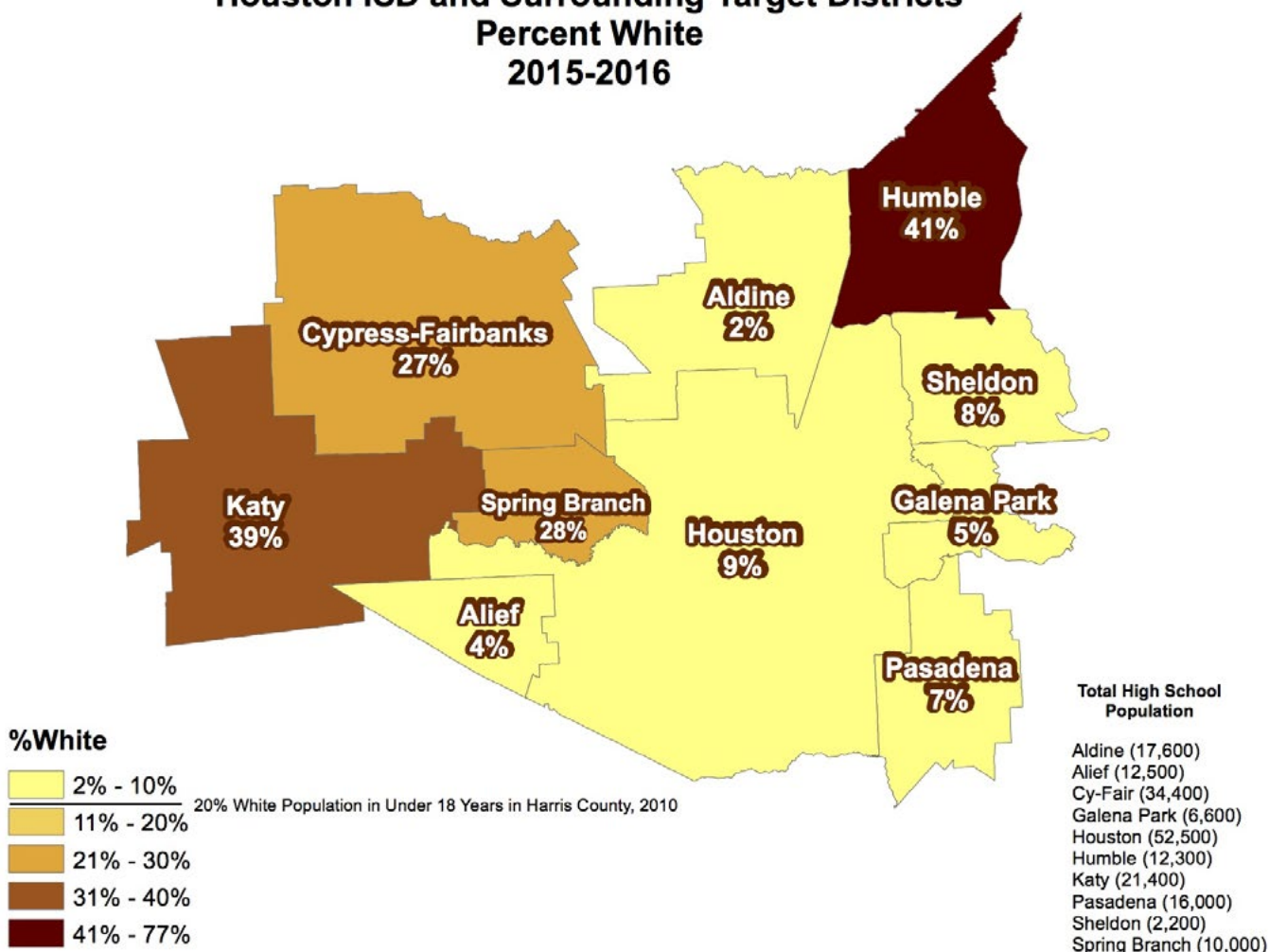
**W**e gauged initial information on college advising services by examining each district and school website. We obtained additional information via phone interviews with district personnel, including college readiness counselors and facilitators, directors of college readiness and counseling, directors of advanced academics, and counseling coordinators. Through interviews, we inquired about college advising needs that were not apparent from our Internet search.

We also draw on data from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2015) as well as the Texas College Access Network (TxCAN). TxCAN, an Educate Texas Initiative, forms part of the National College Access Network. TxCAN functions as a network of education agencies (secondary and postsecondary) with the goal of increasing student access and success in higher education (Texas College Access 2017). For this analysis, we draw on the most recent and obtainable ApplyTexas (2016–17) and FAFSA (2016–2017) TxCAN data reports. The ApplyTexas and FAFSA reports provide insight into college and financial aid application rates across and within districts. ApplyTexas serves as a centralized application system for higher education institutions in Texas (mostly public but also some private and two-year schools). Although ApplyTexas only includes Texas institutions within its portal, it still serves as a reliable source for understanding college application trends given that students, especially race/ethnic minorities and students classified as socio-economically disadvantaged, are more likely to apply to institutions in close proximity (Turley 2009). In Texas, for example, nearly 52 percent of high school graduates attend an in-state institution (this includes both 2- and 4-year institutions) (Texas Higher Education Data 2016).

In this report, we focus on gathering the following information for each district: total number of high schools, total number of seniors, 2-year and 4-year institution college application and enrollment rates, information about programs (internal or external) offering college advising, and other types of college advising resources.

Figure 1. Percent white in target Harris County districts

### Houston ISD and Surrounding Target Districts Percent White 2015-2016



# Brief Overview of Target Districts

We begin with a brief overview of the nine target districts in Harris County. The districts vary in demographics, economic status, and size, including both the total number of schools and students. Figure 1 displays the percentage of white students across target districts and the total high school population. Districts geographically further away from Houston ISD tend to serve larger percentages of white students than districts in closer proximity to Houston ISD (e.g., Katy ISD is 39 percent white and Humble ISD is 41 percent white). Illustrating the racial and ethnic breakdown of students in the target districts, Table 1 shows that many of the districts serve a predominantly minority student population. In particular, Aldine, Galena Park, and Sheldon serve areas where more than 90 percent of students are Hispanic or Black. Pasadena is unique in that it serves the largest majority Hispanic student population (83%) relative to the other target districts.

Figure 2 illustrates the scale of economic disadvantage in the target districts and the total number of high schools per district. Districts geographically further away from Houston ISD are composed of fewer students classified as economically disadvantaged. Katy ISD's student population is among the least disadvantaged at 28 percent, and similarly Humble ISD, the district with the largest white student population, is only 34 percent economically disadvantaged. In Cypress-Fairbanks ISD, one of the most racially/ethnically mixed districts, nearly 50 percent of students are economically disadvantaged. Districts nearest to Houston ISD tend to serve a large proportion of students classified as economically disadvantaged, similar to Houston ISD. More than 75 percent of students in Aldine, Sheldon, Galena Park, and Pasadena ISD are classified as economically disadvantaged based on student qualification for free or reduced lunch.

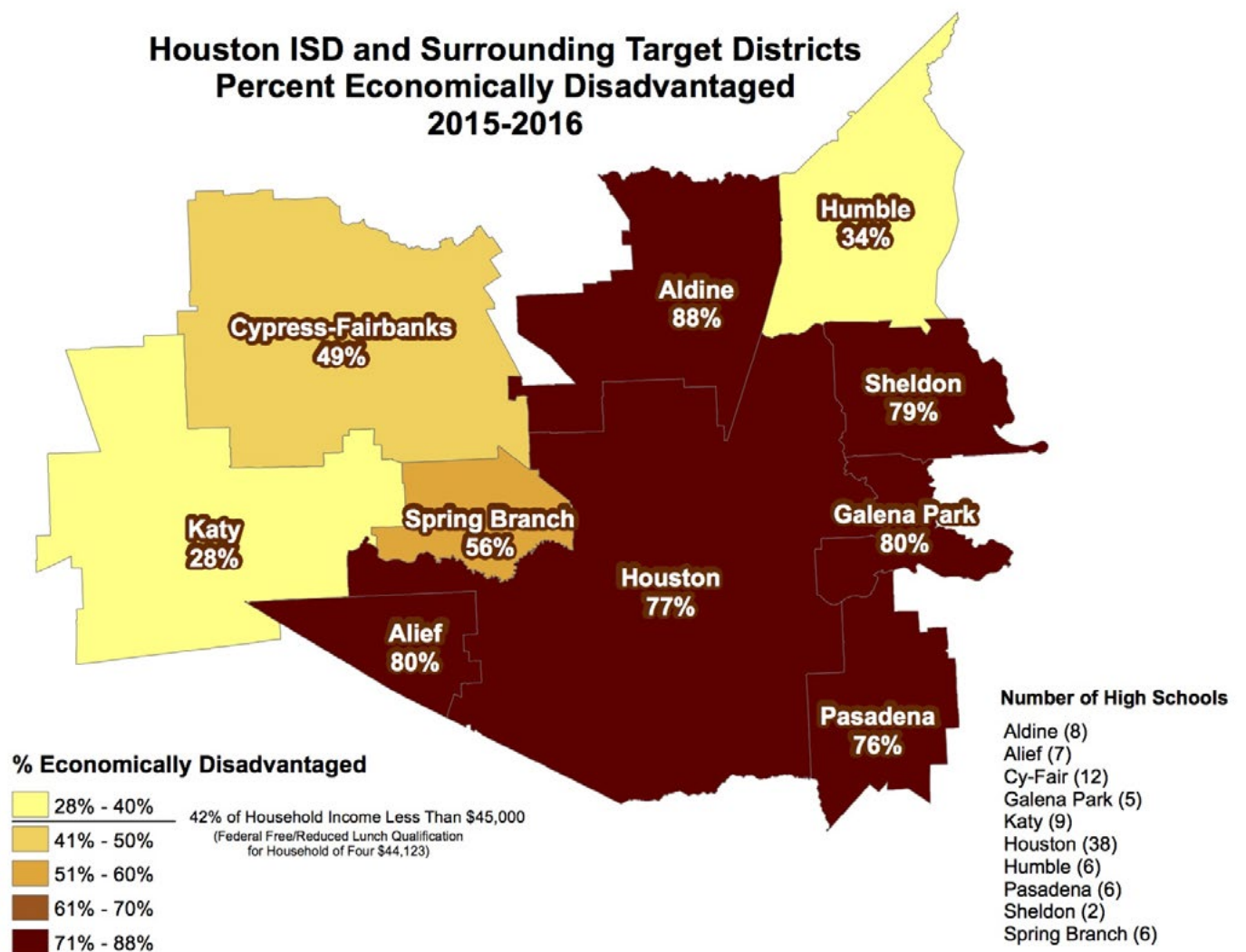
**Table 1. Breakdown of four major racial and ethnic groups in target Harris County school districts (2015–2016)**

District	% White	% Black	% Hispanic	% Asian
Aldine	2%	24%	72%	1%
Alief	4%	29%	52%	12%
Cypress-Fairbanks	27%	17%	44%	9%
Galena Park	5%	15%	78%	1%
Houston	9%	24%	62%	4%
Humble	41%	19%	34%	3%
Katy	38%	10%	35%	14%
Pasadena	6%	7%	83%	3%
Sheldon	7%	21%	70%	1%
Spring Branch	28%	5%	58%	6%

Data Source: Texas Education Agency Academic Performance Reports.



Figure 2. Percent economically disadvantaged in target Harris County districts



# Documentation and Access to Data

Through the information gathering process, we found that target districts struggle with limited documentation and/or accessibility to college application and enrollment data. Some district staff indicated that they did not have application rates readily available and had to look into ApplyTexas, FAFSA, and/or Common Application data. One staff contact indicated that obtaining application rates would be very labor intensive. Other districts receive data directly from ApplyTexas and/or FAFSA but do not have information on students who apply out of state. They directed us to the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), ApplyTexas, FAFSA, or the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. All nine districts collect NSC data but most cannot easily access the information. One district, for instance, indicated that they do not keep track of the NSC data because they do not have the means for doing so. Similarly, with ApplyTexas data, limited personnel and data documentation challenges hinder access to this information. Such obstacles create an arduous process for tracking and understanding post-secondary outcomes.

We overcome the obstacle with limited documentation and access to data by drawing on other sources of data, such as the TxCAN reports (please see data and methods section for a more detailed description). Below, we report on patterns in college application submission rates, college enrollment rates, and FAFSA completion rates. From there, we delve into college advising services and distribution of these services.

**Table 2. ApplyTexas student applicant frequencies and rates for target Harris County school districts as of February 25, 2017**

School District and High School	Number of Applicants
<b>Aldine ISD</b>	
Aldine Senior	357
Benjamin O. Davis	308
Carver Magnet	126
Eisenhower	215
Hall Center	10
Macarthur	397
Nimitz	327
Victory Early College	113
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,853</b>
<b># of Seniors</b>	<b>2,957</b>
<b>% Applied</b>	<b>63%</b>
<b>Alief ISD**</b>	
Alief Early College	94
Alief Hastings	610
Alief Taylor	480
Elsik	641
Kerr	151
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,976</b>
<b># of Seniors</b>	<b>2,391</b>
<b>% Applied</b>	<b>83%</b>

School District and High School	Number of Applicants
<b>Cypress-Fairbanks ISD**</b>	
Cy-Fair Senior	434
Cypress Creek	325
Cypress Falls	369
Cypress Lakes	275
Cypress Ranch	484
Cypress Ridge	264
Cypress Springs	273
Cypress Woods	439
Jersey Village	313
Langham Creek	303
Windfern	*
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,479</b>
<b># of Seniors</b>	<b>7,983</b>
<b>% Applied</b>	<b>44%</b>
<b>Galena Park ISD</b>	
Galena Park	237
North Shore	*
North Shore Senior	504
Early College Academy	74
<b>Total</b>	<b>815</b>
<b># of Seniors</b>	<b>1,652</b>
<b>% Applied</b>	<b>49%</b>
<b>Houston ISD**</b>	
Barbara Jordan	161
Bellaire Senior	559
Booker T. Washington	128
Carnegie Vanguard	122
Cesar E. Chavez	367
Challenge Early College	90
Debakey	137
East Early College	102
Eastwood Academy	93
ESTEM	77
Energy Institute	99
Evan E. Worthing Sr.	88
Furr	122

School District and High School	Number of Applicants
HSPVA	104
Heights	351
HAIS	83
HS for Law Enforcement & Cri. Jus.	68
Jack Yates	134
James Madison	201
Jane Long	44
Jones Futures Academy	*
Kashmere Senior	89
Liberty	29
Margaret L. Wisdom	212
Mickey Leland Coll. Prep. Acad.	10
Middle College - HCC Felix Fra.	*
Middle College - HCC Gulfton	*
Milby	299
Mirabeau B. Lamar Sr.	416
Mt. Carmel Academy	75
North Forest	150
North Houston Early College	99
Northside	281
Reach Charter	6
Ross S. Sterling	428
Sam Houston Math Sci.	566
Scarborough Senior	128
Sharpstown	235
Sharpstown International	98
South Early College	14
Stephen F. Austin	198
Victory Prep.	7
Waltrip	298
Westbury Christian	25
Westside	452
Wheatley	87
Young Women's Coll. Prep.	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,364</b>
<b># of Seniors</b>	<b>10,573</b>
<b>% Applied</b>	<b>70%</b>

School District and High School	Number of Applicants
<b>Humble ISD</b>	
Atascocita	302
Humble	180
Kingwood	338
Kingwood Park	183
Quest	50
Summer Creek	245
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,298</b>
<b># of Seniors</b>	<b>2,743</b>
<b>% Applied</b>	<b>47%</b>
<b>Katy ISD**</b>	
Cinco Ranch	522
James E. Taylor	409
Katy	313
Martha Raines	*
Mayde Creek	236
Morton Ranch	418
Obra D. Tompkins	379
Opportunity Awareness Center	*
Seven Lakes	573
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,850</b>
<b># of Seniors</b>	<b>4,686</b>
<b>% Applied</b>	<b>61%</b>
<b>Pasadena ISD**</b>	
J. Frank Dobie	443
Pasadena	380
Pasadena Memorial	395
South Houston	455
Sam Rayburn	338
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,011</b>
<b># of Seniors</b>	<b>3,612</b>
<b>% Applied</b>	<b>56%</b>
<b>Sheldon ISD**</b>	
C. E. King	316
<b>Total</b>	<b>316</b>
<b># of Seniors</b>	<b>401</b>
<b>% Applied</b>	<b>79%</b>

School District and High School	Number of Applicants
<b>Spring Branch ISD**</b>	
Academy of Choice	5
Memorial Senior	476
Northbrook Senior	299
Spring Woods Senior	286
Stafford	94
Westchester Acad	94
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,254</b>
<b># of Seniors</b>	<b>2,159</b>
<b>% Applied</b>	<b>58%</b>

Data Source: TxCAN ApplyTexas application report and TxCAN FAFSA completion report.

Note: Senior count is based on FAFSA data. In contrast to four-year universities, community colleges—a common type of two-year institution—do not require an advanced application for admission. ApplyTexas includes applications to four-year and some two-year institutions.

\* = fewer than 5

\*\*Data unavailable for some schools.

# College Application, Enrollment, and Financial Aid Application Rates

## College Application Rates

Drawing on the ApplyTexas report on student applicant data, we find that student applicant rates to Texas colleges and universities vary across target districts in Harris County. Table 2 denotes the number and rate of students that applied to a Texas post-secondary institution from August 1, 2016 to February 25, 2017. Alief and Sheldon ISD have the highest applicant rates at 83 percent and 79 percent, respectively, while Cypress-Fairbanks ISD (44%) and Humble ISD (47%) have the lowest. Some of the more economically *disadvantaged* districts have the highest applicant rates (e.g., Sheldon, Alief, and Aldine ISD). This trend is similar to Houston ISD, which serves a large portion of students from high-need communities but has one of the higher college application rates. Some of the more economically *advantaged* districts have moderate to low student applicant rates (e.g., Humble and Katy ISD). In Humble ISD, for example, where 34 percent of students are considered economically disadvantaged, only 47 percent of students submitted a college application. This applicant rate pattern is not surprising given that students from more advantaged communities have more resources to attend out-of-state institutions (Mattern and Wyatt 2009; Niu 2015). We will return to discussing out-of-state enrollment in the next section on college enrollment rates.

Additional explanations may exist for the inverse relationship between socioeconomic status and Texas college application rates. First, ApplyTexas serves as a common application for Texas institutions. Some four-year institutions, like Rice University, and other two-year institutions, such as local community colleges, are not represented in the application portal. Students in more advantaged districts may be applying to in-state institutions like Rice University that are not represented in the ApplyTexas data, to out-of-state schools, or they may be applying directly to their Texas institutions of interest, which brings the ApplyTexas student applicant rate down for these

districts.<sup>3</sup> Second, given that ApplyTexas allows students to apply for admission to both four-year and participating two-year institutions, it may be that students in more disadvantaged districts are submitting applications for admission to participating two-year institutions at higher rates. In contrast to four-year universities, community colleges—a common type of two-year institution—do *not* require an advanced application for admission. Having met certain requirements, students can typically enroll without a formal admission review process. Hence, it may be that the ApplyTexas application simply facilitates enrollment requests across these two-year institutions for students.

## College Enrollment Rates

In addition to gauging college application data, we also draw on ApplyTexas to understand students' college enrollment rates across Harris County. Table 3 denotes the enrollment rates of high school graduates enrolled in a Texas public or private higher education institution (including 2- and 4-year schools) the fall semester after high school graduation. These rates are conditional on the number of graduates per district.<sup>4</sup> The data in Table 3 only includes students whom the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board was able to track or find. Students not trackable or not found could potentially be at an out-of-state institution, could have moved to other states for other reasons, could be in the workforce or may not have enrolled in a higher education institution and may not be employed.

Among the districts serving more advantaged students, higher rates of students attend four-year institutions

<sup>3</sup> Out-of-state application data was not available for this report but future research inquiries and interested readers may refer to National Student Clearinghouse or the Common Application data.

<sup>4</sup> This includes all students who completed all requirements to receive a high school diploma during the academic school year (Texas Education Agency).

than two-year institutions. In contrast, across districts serving more economically disadvantaged populations, higher rates of students attend two-year institutions. For instance, in Galena Park ISD, one of the most economically disadvantaged target districts, 28 percent of students attend a Texas two-year institution compared to 14 percent of students in the district who attend a Texas four-year institution.

As previously mentioned, proximity to college generally plays a key role for economically disadvantaged and racial/ethnically diverse districts. For instance, districts along the ship channel and near San Jacinto Community College have “Education Planners” or college advisers associated with San Jacinto Community College. San Jacinto deploys these planners to districts such as Galena Park, Sheldon, and Pasadena ISD. The planners can assist with general college applications, but their primary focus is enrolling students at San Jacinto Community College. Although it is unclear from our data how long these planners have been at the districts, it could be that these types of services are driving students in more economically disadvantaged districts towards enrollment in community college. Notably, the districts with higher percentages of students attending two-year institutions are also districts with higher percentages of Hispanic students. The more advantaged districts show smaller percentage point differences in the rate of students attending Texas two-year versus four-year institutions and attendance at four-year schools is higher.

We return to discussing out-of-state enrollment, which may provide an explanation for this phenomenon. While we do not have data for Texas high school graduates’ out-of-state post-secondary enrollment for this report, we can refer to Bancroft and Chukhray (2016) as well as other research to help draw conclusions. Bancroft and Chukhray (2016) found that students from schools serving largely disadvantaged populations often had not considered attending an institution out of town, especially an institution out of state, until their college success adviser encouraged them to consider this option. In general, proximity to college plays an important role in college enrollment, especially for less advantaged groups and minority students (Turley 2006; 2009). Out-of-state attendance is lowest among Hispanic students in particular and among students with less educated parents (e.g., less than a bachelor’s degree) (Niu 2015). Students from more affluent and higher educated families are more likely to attend out-of-state schools (Mattern and Wyatt 2009). This implies that Harris County students from advantaged families may be more likely to apply to and enroll in out-of-state schools. Hence, the smaller percentage point difference in two-year versus four-year college attendance rates for advantaged districts may be due in part to these students’ greater likelihood of enrolling in out-of-state schools. College enrollment trends across the districts indicate a need for increased college advising services in more disadvantaged districts to assist students in applying to institutions that best match their qualifications.

**Table 3. High school graduate enrollment rate in a Texas public or independent higher education institution in fall 2015**

District	2-yr Public/Ind	% of Graduates Enrolled (2-year)	4-yr Public/Ind	% of Graduates Enrolled (4-year)	Not Trackable*	Not Found*	Total School Graduates
Aldine	750	22%	581	17%	371	1,668	3,364
Alief	359	14%	702	27%	311	1,167	2,559
Cypress-Fairbanks	2,006	27%	2,201	29%	513	2,823	7,479
Galena Park	429	28%	218	14%	97	813	1,557
Houston	1,518	16%	2,457	26%	1,187	4,515	9,497
Humble	688	26%	756	28%	100	1,131	2,677
Katy	1,171	25%	1,610	34%	405	1,498	4,684
Pasadena	1,110	35%	444	14%	194	1,454	3,216
Sheldon	129	30%	74	17%	25	202	430
Spring Branch	330	17%	666	33%	299	703	1,998
<b>Total**:</b>	<b>8,490</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>9,709</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>3,502</b>	<b>15,974</b>	<b>37,461</b>

Data Source: college enrollment data is from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board; graduate data is from the Texas Education Agency.

\*Not trackable graduates had non-standard ID numbers that did not find a match at Texas higher education institutions. \*Not found\* graduates had standard ID numbers that were not found in the specified fall term at Texas higher education institutions.

\*\* Total represents the totals across districts.

## FAFSA Completion Rates

An important step in the college-going process for low-income students is securing financial aid. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) provides students an avenue for accessing financial assistance for college costs. FAFSA completion numbers across school districts are considerably low (Table 4). On average, only about 29 percent of students classified as seniors completed a FAFSA application by the start of January 2017 (for FAFSA completion rates by school, please see Table 5). The low completion numbers may be due in part to the FAFSA deadline changing from the spring to the fall semester (i.e., October) (Federal Student Aid). The overlapping timeline of college application deadlines and the new FAFSA deadline may have placed additional strain on students to complete the form and on counselors to assist with this process.

**Table 4. FAFSA completion rate across target Harris County school districts as of January 2017**

District	Completed	Senior Count	% Complete
Aldine	722	2,957	24%
Alief	744	2,391	31%
Cypress-Fairbanks	2,370	7,983	30%
Galena Park	323	1,652	20%
Houston	3,513	10,573	33%
Humble	697	2,743	25%
Katy	1,478	4,686	32%
Pasadena	761	3,612	21%
Sheldon*	84	401	21%
Spring Branch*	641	2,159	30%
<b>Total**:</b>	<b>11,333</b>	<b>39,157</b>	<b>29%</b>

Data Source: TxCAN FAFSA completion report.

\*Data unavailable for some high schools.

\*\* Total represents the totals across districts.

Nonetheless, early January 2017 percentages were similar to completion percentages from the previous academic year, which averaged about 29 percent across the nine target districts. Application rates across the target districts are likely to vary based on the socioeconomic and demographic makeup of the district, with less advantaged districts and districts with a likely higher immigrant student population showing lower completion rates. Among the target districts, Katy ISD—one of the highest percent white districts—had the highest percentage of FAFSA completions in fall of 2016 (32%), while Galena Park ISD—one of the lowest percent white districts—had the lowest FAFSA completion rate (20%). Overall, districts with the

highest percentages of students identified as economically disadvantaged had the lowest FAFSA completion rates.

**Table 5. FAFSA completion rate by school across Harris County school districts as of January 2017**

School District and High School	Number Complete
<b>Aldine ISD</b>	
Aldine Senior	125
Carver Magnet	86
Eisenhower	132
Hall Center For Education	0
Macarthur	192
Nimitz	118
Victory Early College	69
<b>Total</b>	<b>722</b>
<b># of Seniors</b>	<b>2,957</b>
<b>% Applied</b>	<b>24%</b>
<b>Alief ISD</b>	
Alief Early College	47
Alief Hastings	197
Alief Taylor	174
Elsik	200
Kerr	126
<b>Total</b>	<b>744</b>
<b># of Seniors</b>	<b>2,391</b>
<b>% Applied</b>	<b>31%</b>
<b>Cypress-Fairbanks ISD</b>	
Cy-Fair Senior	271
Cypress Creek	235
Cypress Falls	280
Cypress Lakes	216
Cypress Ranch	322
Cypress Ridge	153
Cypress Springs	159
Cypress Woods	242
Jersey Village	232
Langham Creek	260
Windfern	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,370</b>
<b># of Seniors</b>	<b>7,983</b>
<b>% Applied</b>	<b>30%</b>

School District and High School	Number Complete
<b>Galena Park ISD</b>	
Galena Park	97
North Shore Senior High	226
Early College Academy	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>323</b>
<b># of Seniors</b>	<b>1,652</b>
<b>% Applied</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Houston ISD</b>	
Barbara Jordan	52
Bellaire	296
Carnegie Vanguard	87
Cesar E. Chavez	197
Challenge Early College	61
Davis	304
Debakey	120
East Early College	72
Eastwood Academy	57
ESTEM Academy	37
Energy Institute	55
Evan E. Worthing	39
Furr	40
HSPVA	119
Heights	159
HAIS	52
HS for Law Enforcement & Cri. Jus.	33
Hous. Math Science Tech	121
Jack Yates	48
James Madison	71
Jane Long	20
Jones Futures Academy	0
Kashmere	23
Margaret L. Wisdom	57
Mickey Leland Coll. Prep. Acad.	7
Milby	97
Mirabeau B. Lamar Sr.	212
Mount Carmel Academy	36
North Forest	62
North Houston Early Coll.	64

School District and High School	Number Complete
Reach Charter	0
Ross S. Sterling	48
Sam Houston Math Sci.	121
Scarborough	19
Sharpstown	54
Sharpstown International	56
South Early College	14
Stephen F. Austin	82
Waltrip	110
Westbury Christian	86
Westside	270
Wheatley	32
Young Women's Coll. Prep.	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,508</b>
<b># of Seniors</b>	<b>10,573</b>
<b>% Applied</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>Humble ISD</b>	
Atascocita	184
Humble	48
Kingwood High	171
Kingwood Park	100
Quest	41
Summer Creek	153
<b>Total</b>	<b>697</b>
<b># of Seniors</b>	<b>2,743</b>
<b>% Applied</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Katy ISD</b>	
Cinco Ranch	249
James E. Taylor	179
Katy	182
Martha Raines	0
Mayde Creek	175
Morton Ranch	239
Obra D. Tompkins	186
Seven Lakes	268
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,478</b>
<b># of Seniors</b>	<b>4,686</b>
<b>% Applied</b>	<b>32%</b>



School District and High School	Number Complete
<b>Pasadena ISD</b>	
J. Frank Dobie	221
Pasadena	108
Pasadena Memorial	196
South Houston	97
Sam Rayburn	139
<b>Total</b>	<b>761</b>
<b># of Seniors</b>	<b>3,612</b>
<b>% Applied</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>Sheldon ISD</b>	
C E King High School	84
<b>Total</b>	<b>84</b>
<b># of Seniors</b>	<b>401</b>
<b>% Applied</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>Spring Branch ISD</b>	
Academy Of Choice	—
Memorial Senior	170
Northbrook Senior	100
Spring Woods Senior	142
Stafford	168
Westchester Acad Intl.	61
<b>Total</b>	<b>641</b>
<b># of Seniors</b>	<b>2,159</b>
<b>% Applied</b>	<b>30%</b>

Data Source: TxCAN FAFSA completion report.  
 Note: Data unavailable for some high schools.

High immigrant student populations that may not be eligible for federal aid but might be eligible for state aid may also drive the low FAFSA completion numbers. Immigrant, non-citizen, Texas resident students may have filled out the Texas Application for State Financial Aid (TASFA). Unfortunately, no centralized data source exists to track the number of students who complete the TASFA. Students who either completed a TASFA application or were not eligible for either FAFSA or TASFA may depress FAFSA completion rates in districts with higher percentages of immigrant and Hispanic students, such as Pasadena, Sheldon, Galena Park, Aldine and Houston ISD. Given the change in the FAFSA completion timeline, which overlaps with college application deadlines, additional college advising personnel could assist with meeting the needs of students from high-need communities in Harris County.

# Post-Secondary Advising Services and Distribution

## Advising

We identify five types of advising geared towards students' post-secondary trajectories across the nine target districts. Table 6 illustrates the five types of counselors: regular (traditional) guidance, community college, college-focused, Advise TX, and career-focused counselors.

*Regular (or traditional) guidance counselors* typically hold a master's degree in Counseling and Guidance. Regular counselors guide students in their academic trajectories (e.g., course selection and career plans) and in their social and emotional development or needs. These counselors also assist in the implementation of academic assessments, such as state examinations, and other duties assigned to them unrelated to college advising. Regular guidance counselors also provide college advising even if they have little or no training in college advising. Regular guidance counselors are insufficient resources for college advising because they typically balance other tasks such as surveillance duties, exam proctoring, course scheduling, personal issue guidance, and behavioral issue management (Fitch and Marshall 2004; Indiana Chamber 2014). In some districts, a majority of high school campuses share at least one counseling personnel with another campus, which adds extra burden for counselors and may hinder ease of access to advising. In many districts, counselors occupy roles with combined types of advising where a counselor advises students on both career and college pathways.

A *community college representative* (through a partnership between a district and a community college) offers guidance mostly towards a two-year path. They make presentations to groups of students about community college options. Most target districts have a community college representative visiting some high schools at least once per week for college awareness activities. No districts have a community college representative on each high school

campus. Houston ISD does not employ community college representatives.

We define *college-focused counselors* as individuals whose sole focus is in guiding students towards a university or college path (this may include some community college guidance). Examples of a college-focused counselor include College Access or College Now counselors. College Access counselors must have a minimum of a bachelor's degree and they tend to have a Texas Education Agency Counseling Certification. They focus on guiding students on a four-year path, specifically helping students with their college search, college applications and admissions, financial aid, and advising on other postsecondary questions. College Now counselors, usually hold a degree in counseling, and are also solely focused on providing college guidance. College Now counselors differ in that they specifically work with high school students who have at least a 3.0 GPA and are earning college credits while still in high school through a high school and community college partnership. Across the target districts, college-focused counselors are spread thin. About half of the target districts have a college-focused counselor serving schools in some capacity. Unlike Houston ISD, none of the districts employ a college-focused counselor on every high school campus.

*Advise TX counselors* are dedicated to guiding students towards a four-year college path through one-on-one advising. These counselors are part of an external organization and are recent bachelor's degree graduates from partner universities (e.g., Texas A&M). In addition to their presence in some Houston ISD schools, six out of the nine target districts have an Advise TX counselor at one or more campuses. The data show considerable variation, however, in the number of schools served within these districts, with most districts having a small number of campuses

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**Table 6. Advising services and resources across target Harris County school districts (2016-17)**

School District High School	Regular (Traditional) ONLY	Comm. College ONLY	College-Focused ONLY	Advise TX ONLY	Career-Focused ONLY	Shared Counselor (between campuses)	Combined Focus Counselor (note and examples provided at end of this table)
<b>A. Aldine ISD</b>							
Aldine	7	1	none	1	none	none	2 (CF, CA, & Reg)
Carver	3	1	none	none	none	none	2 (CF, CA, & Reg)
Davis	10	1	none	1	none	none	2 (CF, CA, & Reg)
Eisenhower	6	1	none	1	none	none	2 (CF, CA, & Reg)
Hall Center for Education	2	1	none	none	none	none	none
MacArthur	10	1	none	none	none	none	2 (CF, CA, & Reg)
Nimitz	7	1	none	1	none	none	2 (CF, CA, & Reg)
Victory Early College	1	1	none	none	none	none	none
<b>B. Alief ISD</b>							
Alief Early College	1	1	none	none	none	1 (Reg)	1 (CF& Reg)
Alief Learning Center	3	1	none	none	none	none	none
Crossroads	none	1	none	none	none	none	none
Elsik	8	1	1	1	1	none	none
Hastings	8	1	1	1	1	none	none
Kerr	2	1	none	none	none	1 (Reg )	1 (CF & Reg)
Taylor	9	1	1	1	1	none	none
<b>C. Cypress-Fairbanks ISD</b>							
Cypress Creek	8	none	1	none	1	1 (CC)	none
Cypress-Fairbanks	6	none	1	none	none	1 (CC)	3 (CA & Reg)
Cypress Falls	5	none	1	none	none	1 (CC)	4 (CA & Reg)
Cypress Lakes	8	none	1	none	1	1 (CC)	none
Cypress Park	2	none	none	none	none	none	2 (CA & Reg)
Cypress Ranch	8	none	none	none	1	1 (CC)	none
Cypress Ridge	6	none	1	none	none	1 (CC)	3 (CA & Reg)
Cypress Springs	8	none	1	1	1	1 (CC)	none
Cypress Woods	5	none	none	none	none	1 (CC)	4 (CA & Reg)
Jersey Village	5	none	1	none	none	1 (CC)	4 (CA & Reg)
Langham Creek	5	none	1	none	none	1 (CC)	4 (CA & Reg)
Windfern	1	none	none	none	none	1 (CC)	none
<b>D. Galena Park ISD</b>							
Galena Park	5	none	1	none	1	1 (CC)	none
Early College	1	1	none	none	1	none	none
North Shore Senior High	9	none	1	none	1	1 (CC)	none
Zotz Education Center	1	none	none	none	1	none	none
<b>E. Houston ISD</b>							
Barbara Jordan	1	none	none	1	1	1 (CF)	none
Bellaire	10	none	1	none	11	2 (CF)	none
Booker T. Washington	2	none	none	none	none	1 (CF)	none
Carnegie Vanguard	2	none	2	none	none	1 (CF)	2 (CF)
Cesar E. Chavez	4	none	3	none	none	none	none

School District High School	Regular (Traditional) ONLY	Comm. College ONLY	College-Focused ONLY	Advise TX ONLY	Career-Focused ONLY	Shared Counselor (between campuses)	Combined Focus Counselor (note and examples provided at end of this table)
Challenge Early College	none	none	1	none	none	1 (CF)	none
DeBakey	2	none	none	none	none	1 (CF)	1 (CF, Reg)
East Early College	1	none	none	none	none	1 (CF)	none
Eastwood Academy	2	none	2	none	1	1 (CF)	2 (CA, CF, other)
Energy Institute	none	none	none	none	2	1 (CF)	none
ESTEM Academy	none	none	1	none	none	1 (CF)	none
Evan E. Worthing	2	none	1	none	1	1 (CF)	none
Furr	2	none	1	none	1	1 (CF)	none
HAIS	1	none	1	none	none	1 (CF)	none
Heights	2	none	2	none	1	none	none
High School for Law & Justice	1	none	1	none	1	1 (CF)	none
HSPVA	3	none	1	none	none	1 (CF)	none
Jack Yates	2	none	2	none	1	1 (CF)	none
James Madison	5	none	3	1	none	none	none
Jane Long Academy	1	none	none	none	none	1 (CF)	1 (Reg, other)
Jones Futures Academy	1	none	0	none	none	1 (CF)	none
Kashmere	3	none	0	none	none	1 (CF)	none
Lamar	9	none	3	none	none	none	none
Margaret Long Wisdom	2	none	5	none	1	none	none
Mickey Leland Coll. Prep.	none	none	none	none	none	1 (CF)	1 (CF, other)
Middle College: Fraga	none	none	none	none	none	1 (CF)	none
Middle College: Gulfton	1	none	none	none	none	1 (CF)	none
Milby	4	none	2	none	none	none	1 (CF, other)
Mt. Carmel Academy	1	none	none	none	none	1 (CF)	1 (CF, other)
Liberty	none	none	1	none	none	1 (CF)	none
Challenge	none	none	1	none	none	1 (CF)	none
North Forest	4	none	1	none	none	none	none
North Houston Early College	1	none	1	none	none	1 (CF)	none
Northside	3	none	1	none	2	2 (CF)	none
Reach Charter	none	none	none	none	none	1 (CF)	none
Ross S. Sterling	2	none	3	1	1	1 (CF)	none
Sam Houston MSTC	5	none	1	none	none	2 (CF)	none
Scarsborough	none	none	none	none	1	1 (CF)	none
Sharpstown	4	none	2	none	none	none	none
Sharpstown International	1	none	1	none	none	1 (CF)	1 (Reg, other)
South Early	1	none	none	none	none	1 (CF)	none
Stephen F. Austin	2	none	2	none	none	2 (CF)	1 (Reg, other) 1 (Reg, CF)
Victory Prep.	1	none	none	1	none	none	none
Waltrip	none	none	1	none	none	3	1 (CA, other)
Westbury	1	none	3	1	2	none	none
Westside	2	none	1	none	none	2 (CF)	none
Wheatley	5	none	1	none	none	none	none
Young Women's Coll. Prep.	1	none	none	none	none	1 (CF)	none

School District High School	Regular (Traditional) ONLY	Comm. College ONLY	College-Focused ONLY	Advise TX ONLY	Career-Focused ONLY	Shared Counselor (between campuses)	Combined Focus Counselor (note and examples provided at end of this table)
<b>F. Humble ISD</b>							
Atascocita	10	none	none	none	none	none	none
Humble	7	none	none	none	none	none	none
Kingwood	7	none	none	none	none	none	none
Kingwood Park	5	none	none	none	none	none	none
Quest Early College	2	none	none	none	none	none	none
Summer Creek	6	none	none	none	none	none	none
<b>G. Katy ISD</b>							
Katy	none	none	none	none	none	none	7 (CF, CA, Reg)
Cinco Ranch	none	none	none	none	none	none	6 (CF, CA, Reg)
Mayde Creek	none	none	none	1	none	none	6 (CF, CA, Reg)
Morton Ranch	none	none	none	1	none	none	7 (CF, CA, Reg)
Opportunity Awareness Center	none	none	none	none	none	none	2 (CF, CA, Reg)
Raines	none	none	none	none	none	none	2 (CF, CA, Reg)
Seven Lakes	none	none	none	none	none	none	7 (CF, CA, Reg)
Taylor	none	none	none	none	none	none	5 (CF, CA, Reg)
Tompkins	none	none	none	none	none	none	6 (CF, CA, Reg)
<b>H. Pasadena ISD</b>							
Lewis Career & Technical	4	none	none	none	none	3 (CC)	1 (CF & Reg)
Dobie	8	none	1	none	1	3 (CC)	none
Memorial	7	none	1	1	1	3 (CC)	none
Pasadena	6	none	1	1	1	3 (CC)	none
Rayburn	6	none	1	1	1	3 (CC)	none
South Houston	6	none	1	1	1	3 (CC)	none
<b>I. Sheldon ISD</b>							
King HS	4	1	none	1	none	none	none
<b>J. Spring Branch ISD</b>							
Academy of Choice	2	none	none	none	none	none	none
Memorial	6	none	none	none	none	none	none
Northbrook	5	none	1	none	none	none	1 (CF & CA)
Spring Woods	5	none	1	none	none	none	1 (CF & CA)
Stratford	4	none	1	none	none	none	1 (CF & CA)
WAIS	3	none	none	none	none	none	none

Note: *Reg* = regular counselor, *CC* = community college, *CF* = college focused, *CA* = career focused. *Other* refers to other duties (e.g., teaching, scheduling, graduation coach, and other non-counseling duties...etc.).  
*Regular (Traditional)*: Example would be a regular/traditional guidance counselor who may provide some information or guidance about college but has other responsibilities as well.  
*Community College*: Example would be a community college representative who visits high school campuses occasionally and does presentations (especially for a two-year path).  
*College Focused*: Example would be a College Now, College Access Counselor, College Access Coordinator or College Success Adviser.  
*Advise TX*: Example would be a recent graduate from a partner university (e.g., Texas A&M).  
*Career Focused*: Example would be a College & Career or Career & Technical Counselor.

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served. Advise TX counselors arrange college campus visits for students and host visiting college admission representatives; they also guide students with financial aid and other college related information (e.g., SAT/ACT testing, college applications, and college attendance). A concern with Advise TX is that the program utilizes recent college graduates as advisers who commit only one or two years of advising before moving on to other pursuits. This systematic turnover of counselors indicates a constant disruption in advising with an added burden of personnel reshuffling and a learning curve. This may be especially burdensome to districts serving disadvantaged families, such as Alief, Pasadena, and Aldine ISD.

We define *career-focused counselors* as individuals guiding students towards a post-secondary career or vocational training. Examples include College and Career or Career and Technical counselors. Such counselors, who split their time between different types of advising (e.g., college and career), are termed “combined focus counselor” in the last column in Table 6. These counselors do not focus solely on providing college guidance; they also provide career and technical education guidance (e.g., certification opportunities). They typically hold a minimum of a bachelor’s degree and often have an additional teaching certificate. Across the target districts, seven out of nine have at least one career-focused counselor or a combined-focus counselor (whose focus includes career) present at some campuses. Two districts have no career-focused counselors (Humble and Sheldon ISD). In many cases, the career-focused counselors also have other tasks (some of which are non-advising). Some of the more economically disadvantaged districts lack college-focused personnel and instead have more career-focused staff. Galena Park ISD, for example, with 80 percent economically disadvantaged households (Figure 2), relies more on career-focused counselors (Table 6). The data indicates a need for more post-secondary advising services (especially college-focused) across and within the districts.

The final table (Table 7) illustrates the ratio of counselors (any type) to high school students across Houston ISD and the target districts. In contrast to most of the target districts, where the ratio is one counselor to more than 300 high school students, Houston ISD has a much lower ratio of 1:184. As one target district staff person stated, “We do the best we can” with balancing large caseloads. The substantially lower counselor to student ratio in Houston ISD is largely due to the district-wide hire of college-focused advisers serving each Houston ISD high

**Table 7. Ratio of advisers (any type) by high school students in target districts (2016–2017)**

District	Adviser : Students
Aldine	1:300
Alief	1:400
Cy-Fair	1:391
Galena Park	1:140
Houston	1:184
Humble	1:450
Katy	1:478
Pasadena	1:325
Sheldon	1:475
Spring Branch	1:401

NOTE: This table reflects the ratio of counselors per district relative to high school students (9–12<sup>th</sup> grade).

school campus. The implication is that in most target districts, counselors are unable to provide one-on-one attention to all students. A majority of the target districts do not have a department specifically focused on college advising. Our data demonstrate a strong need for increased advising services and a need for more equitable distribution of these services.

### Advising Programs and Third Party College Advising

While college advising departments are rare among the target districts, third-party nonprofits and other organizations do provide some additional aid to districts. These third-party efforts are typically limited to a small number of high schools. Auxiliary or third party support is provided through organizations such as AVID (a non-profit program that prepares students for a post-secondary education), OneGoal (a nonprofit organization that trains teachers to serve as college advisers), and San Jacinto Community College. AVID, for example, serves Galena Park ISD. OneGoal serves Spring Branch and Aldine ISD. OneGoal is prevalent in only a few classrooms, typically 1–2 classrooms per high school with only about 40 to 50 students in the program per school. Moreover, as previously discussed, San Jacinto Community College deploys Education Planners to high schools within districts in their feeder pattern, including Pasadena, Galena Park, and Sheldon ISD. San Jacinto Community College education planners focus primarily on enrolling students in community college; however, they do provide some general college advising and application assistance outside of this scope.

The data suggest that advising programs are sporadically present and spread thin across and within districts.

Third party college advising programs also vary across school campuses within the same district. Examples of such programs include AVID, College Forward (a program providing economically disadvantaged students with information about college access and persistence), and Center for Success (a program based on a partnership with a local community college). Unfortunately, the presence of such programs is infrequent with no consistent pattern across campuses or districts.<sup>5</sup> This implies a need for a more equitable distribution of advising services.

### Availability of College Information

In addition to varied access to advisers and to college-oriented programs, the extent of available college-related information varies by district and school campus. Three of the nine target districts (i.e., Humble, Spring Branch, and Cypress-Fairbanks ISD) provide abundant college-related information (e.g., college application information, scholarships, and FAFSA) on both high school and district websites. They also provide numerous college-related resource links or online tools related to college. These three districts serve fewer students from economically disadvantaged communities. Many of the other district and school websites provide limited college-related information and in some cases the sites are burdensome to locate. The implication is a lack of equity in access to college-related resources.

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<sup>5</sup> Specific data on these external programs was difficult to obtain from districts.

# Conclusion

Our findings from the college advising needs assessment of nine Harris County target districts indicate a strong need to expand college advising efforts in the districts surrounding Houston ISD, especially for the most economically disadvantaged districts. Although all districts include some form of college advising as well as auxiliary programs, these efforts appear to lack concerted coordination and, most importantly, the results are not as strong as those we have seen for Houston's high school graduates. Target districts need more college advising support overall and a more equitable distribution of advising resources. The inability for some districts to readily provide college application, college enrollment, and FAFSA completion rates indicates that districts likely need additional aid in providing college advising services and in documenting and analyzing data. Moreover, college enrollment patterns indicate socioeconomically disadvantaged students in disadvantaged and advantaged districts alike are enrolling in two-year institutions at disproportionate rates, which could impact the likelihood of their completion of either a two-year or four-year degree (Doyle 2009; Sandy, Gonzalez and Hilmer 2006). Enhanced advising and documenting efforts could facilitate an assessment of whether students are making the best possible choices to meet their needs and interests.

Future research on college advising needs could consider the role interventions play at various levels in the high school process. For instance, do college advising interventions that start in earlier high school grades (e.g., 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>) impact college application and enrollment rates differently than interventions that start in later grades (e.g., 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>)? Moreover, further focus could be given to the role that auxiliary college advising services play in increasing college application and enrollment rates in comparison to district-run college advising services. However, it should be noted that these auxiliary services are limited in scope and generally do not serve all high school cam-

pusers within a district or all students within high schools served. We also find a need for more data. Future research endeavors should develop a centralized data source to track TASFA applications as well as develop relationships with community colleges to easily track direct application data. Finally, researchers should investigate out-of-state application and enrollment trends.

Overall, our findings suggest that the strongest need lies in personnel and support resources. The state's efforts to provide online college and career advising training for counselors, teachers and other staff through House Bill 18 is a positive step forward. Adding additional personnel at these districts that could utilize this training and coordinate advising efforts as well as assist students and parents in the college application process would likely yield the best results. The variation in college application, college enrollment, and FAFSA submission rates both within and across districts also suggests a need for a better and more equitable distribution of college advising resources.



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