



Education  
Strategy  
Group

# Counteracting the COVID-19 Slide for Postsecondary Transitions

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS TO SUPPORT ACCESS AND SUCCESS

# Immediate Action Needed

Without significant action, current high school seniors and juniors are at risk of becoming a “lost COVID-19 cohort.”

Ensuring that every student has the support they need to succeed will take a collaborative effort among state education agencies, governor’s offices, local school districts, higher education institutions and systems, and community-based organizations.

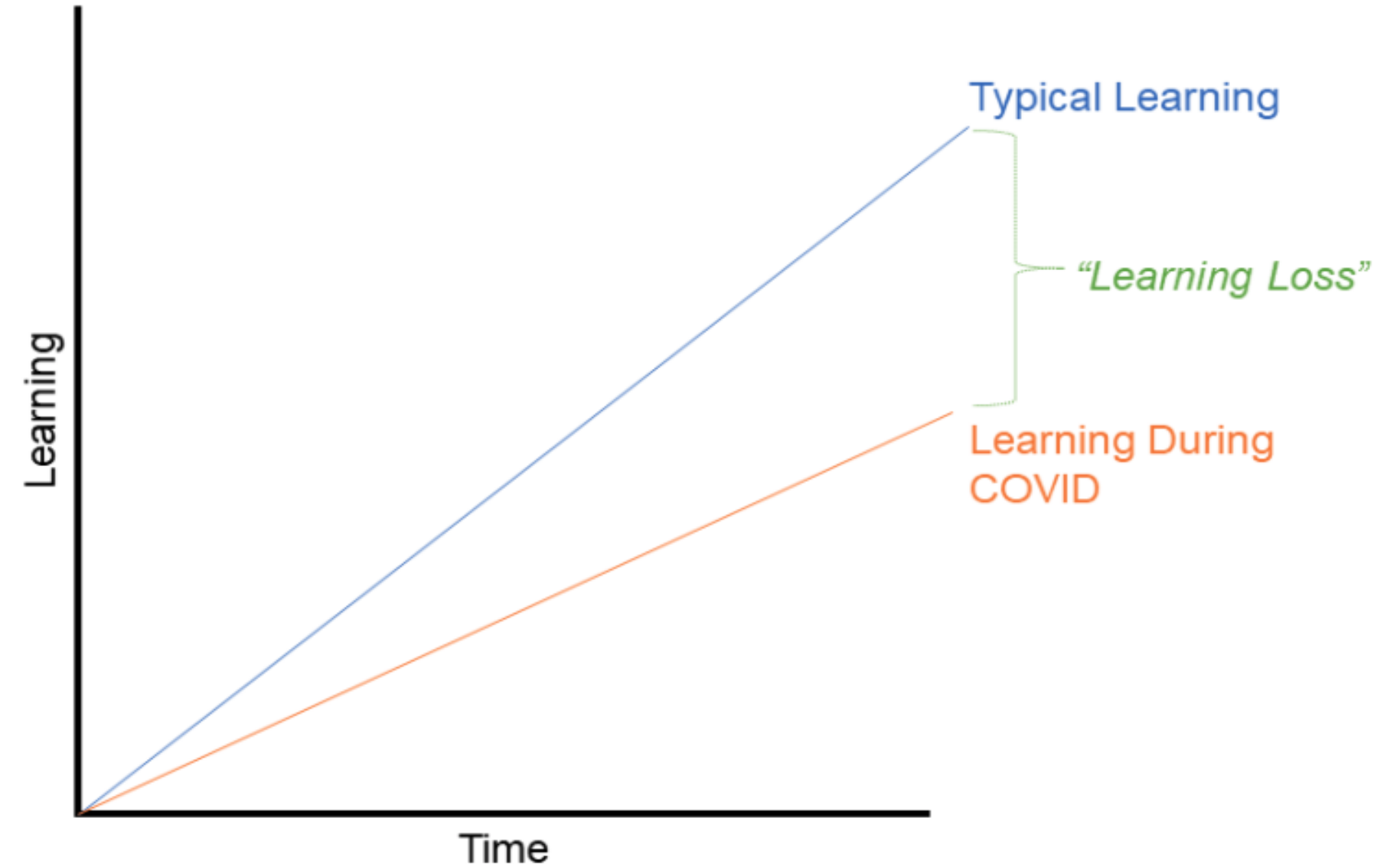


ESG developed a playbook that outlines a set of high-impact, targeted interventions to better support students in preparing for, applying to, and transitioning to a postsecondary education. Together, these strategies can help stem the tide of the pandemic’s impact on student success – and counter the widening equity gaps for our Black, Hispanic, low-income, and first-generation college students.

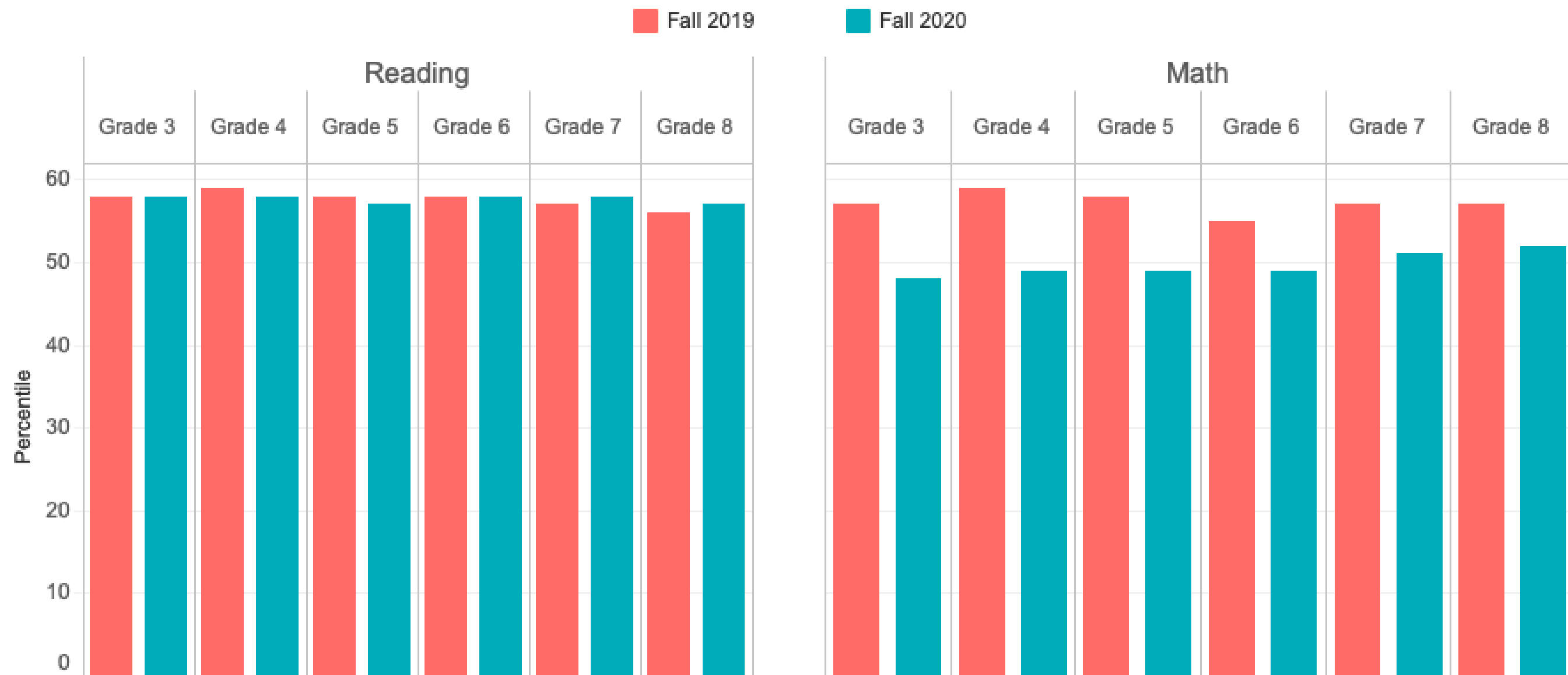
# Learning “Loss” is Widespread

**COVID learning loss: the difference between what was expected in a typical year of learning from what has been seen through the pandemic**

1. There has been **significant learning loss** in both English Language Arts (ELA) and Math, with students in earlier grades most affected.
2. The **equity impact is severe**—certain student groups, especially low-income students and English language learners (ELLs), are falling behind more compared to others.



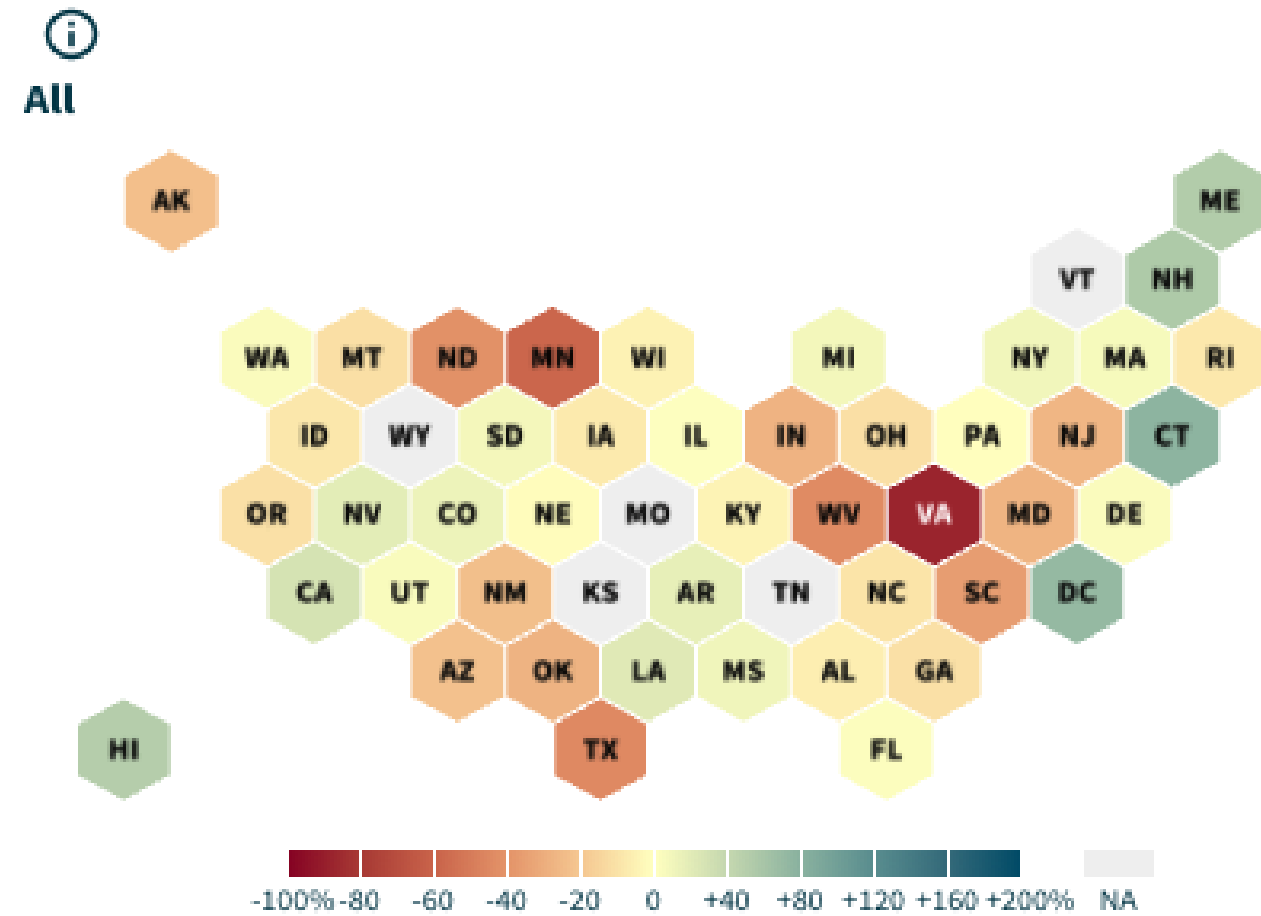
# Student Declines in Math Greater than Reading



NWEA

# Math Progress is Not Consistent

## Percent Change in Student Math Progress



Opportunity Insights

# Significant Impact on Transitions between K-12 and Higher Education

**Undergraduate Enrollment**

**13.1%**

**decline in undergraduate enrollment for first-time students**

*Source: National Student Clearinghouse (December 2020)*

**FAFSA Completion**

**9.4%**

**decline in FAFSA completion rates for high school seniors**

*Source: National College Attainment Network (February 20, 2020)*

**Postsecondary Plans**

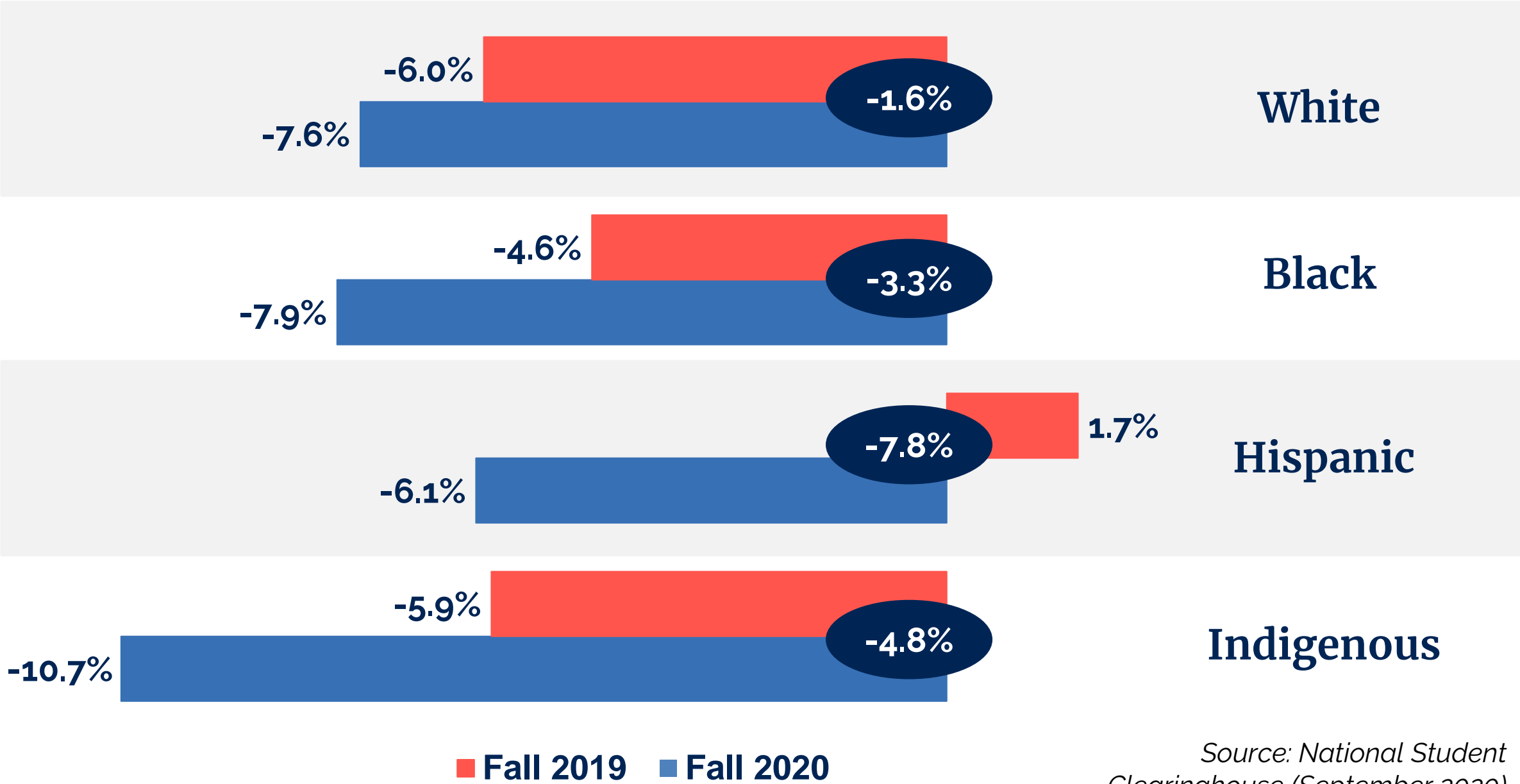
**29.4%**

**percentage of students who canceled their Fall 2020 postsecondary plans**

*Source: U.S. Census Household Pulse Survey (August 2020)*

# Equity Gaps Are Widening

### Year-to-Year Change in Undergraduate Enrollment

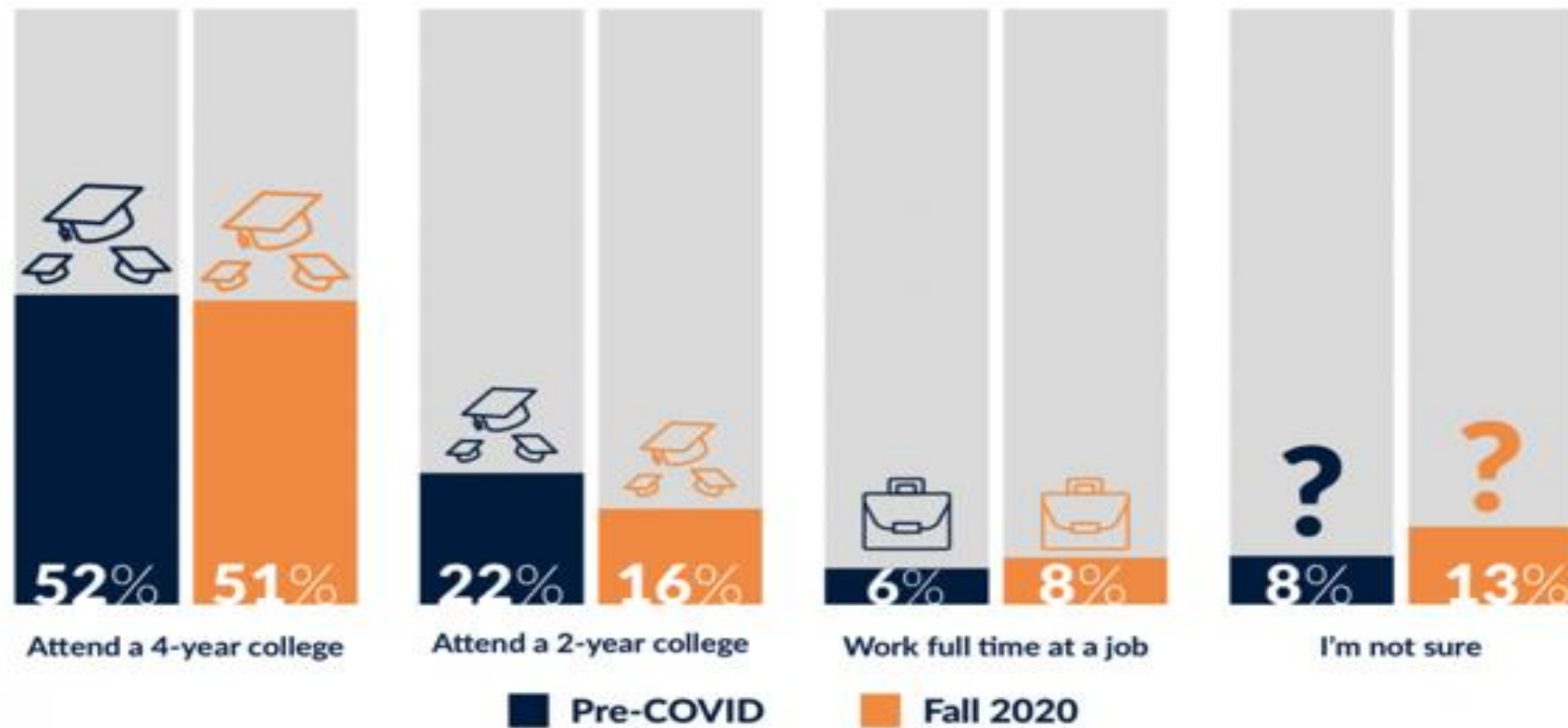


Source: National Student Clearinghouse (September 2020)

Compared to White students, the year-to-year decline in undergraduate enrollment this fall was **2x** as high for **Black** students, **3x** as high for **Indigenous** students, and nearly **5x** as high for **Hispanic** students.

# 1 in 4 Current HS Students Have Changed Their Plans

After you finish high school, what do you expect to do next?



Youth Truth Survey



# How Communities Can Address these COVID Gaps

# Building a Sustainable Strategy

This playbook includes both **short-term solutions** – those that can be implemented almost immediately, depending on the state or community’s existing capacity, to funnel support to the students who need them most – and **medium-term strategies** – which may require additional time and capacity to implement, but will ultimately lead to greater sustainability and impact.

We’ve indicated the timing of each intervention throughout the playbook using the two icons below:



**Short-Term Strategies**



**Medium-Term Strategies**

# The Building Blocks of Support

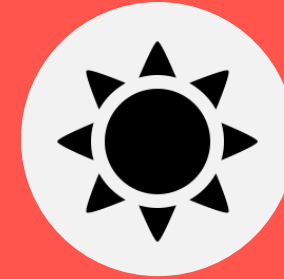
3



Addressing Academic Readiness



Increasing College Enrollment



Tackling Summer Melt

TARGETED INTERVENTIONS

2

Building Awareness of Postsecondary Options



Expanding Networks of Student Support



SYSTEMIC SUPPORTS

1



Harnessing Data to Target Supports

DATA-DRIVEN APPROACHES



## Harnessing Data to Target Supports



Conduct an equity audit of Fall 2020 National Student Clearinghouse data to better understand gaps in direct enrollment by ethnicity, income, geography, etc.



Review high school Seniors and Juniors completion of **postsecondary preparation milestones** (e.g. FAFSA completion, college applications) & academic gaps.



Survey high school Seniors about their postsecondary plans to target supports during the summer.



Host local convenings with K-12, higher education, and nonprofit partners to review data and generate a plan for support for supporting students with the greatest need.

**Example:** As part of its “Getting to Zero” [campaign](#), Delaware developed a data-informed set of comprehensive strategies to maximize postsecondary enrollment, including a statewide College Application Month, FAFSA Campaign, College Decision Day, and direct outreach to students around summer melt. The state sent monthly reports to schools and districts on a set of key indicators to target supports.



# Building Awareness of Postsecondary Options



Develop a state-level communications campaign about the shifting economy and the relevancy of a postsecondary credentials through the post-COVID economic recovery.



Conduct **direct outreach** to students identified as most likely in need of additional assistance to invite student applications and offer tailored support.



Release an **action guide** of the steps for students and families to complete to prepare to transition from high school to college (e.g. FAFSA, ACT/SAT, applications, etc.).



Host **virtual college and career events** with local institutions and industry partners (e.g. fairs, visits, signing days, webinars, panels, etc.).

**Example:** In response to the pandemic, Tennessee launched the “[It’s Go Time TN](#)” campaign to encourage students who had not yet finalized their postsecondary plans to apply and enroll in a postsecondary education. The campaign included a website with student-facing resources, as well as social media content.



## Expanding Networks of Student Support



Provide research-based **digital content** on postsecondary preparation activities to school counselors and CBOs to help students graduate and matriculate in college.



Create a chat bot to offer real-time **virtual advising assistance** and nudges, aligned to the state or district's key steps for postsecondary preparation.



Launch a **volunteer network** to provide tutoring and guidance to high school students (e.g. recent college graduates, state or district staff, industry partners).



Leverage federal funds (e.g., GEER Fund, GEAR UP, TRIO) to increase **local advising capacity** and support for students in areas facing the greatest COVID impacts.

**Example:** A number of states have recently launched automated advising platforms that pair artificial intelligence with trained advisors to provide guidance and support through the college application and financial aid processes. For example, Washington has [Otterbot](#), Texas has [ADVi](#), and Arizona has [Benji](#).



## Addressing Academic Readiness



Offer free dual credit courses for key gateway courses in math and/or ELA to build early momentum for students' postsecondary credit accrual.



Offer a virtual transition course in math and/or ELA during the spring or summer to enable students to enroll directly into credit-bearing coursework.



Develop a tutoring corps to provide direct support to students with academic preparation gaps as a result of COVID learning loss.



Pilot a statewide (or expand local) summer bridge program to provide academic, social-emotional, and navigational supports to students.

**Example:** Indiana used GEAR UP dollars to [scale summer bridge](#) supports at 11 institutions. The [Texas College Bridge](#) program, funded through the initial CARES Act dollars, expanded summer advising support and provided financial incentives to students for completing coursework after high school graduation that enabled them to place directly into credit-bearing courses upon college enrollment.



## Increasing College Enrollment



Launch a statewide or regional FAFSA completion challenge (including data tracking, communications campaigns, virtual events, incentives, etc.).



Reduce barriers to enrollment through fee waivers for applications to public institutions and extended application and financial aid deadlines.



Develop an automatic admissions policy for students that meet eligibility requirements for the state's public postsecondary institutions.



Make a college affordability tool freely available for students and families to help them understand, budget, and plan for the costs of college.

**Example:** In Idaho, students who meet defined benchmarks are automatically accepted to the state's eight public universities and colleges. All other students are accepted to six institutions offering certificate and technical programs. Each fall, high school seniors and their families are notified of their acceptance and are encouraged to complete an application for free for their institution for choice using the Apply Idaho portal.





# Tackling Summer Melt



Extend contracts for counselors and/or college access partners through the summer to enable them to provide direct support to students throughout the transition.



Develop a toolkit to share data and high-impact strategies on addressing summer melt with school and district administrators and invest in local initiatives.



Develop a check-in survey to identify Seniors' postsecondary plans and develop a coordinated K-12 & higher education approach for through summer engagement.



Start an emergency grant program for students and families to overcome financial hurdles to enrolling in postsecondary.

**Example:** The Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, which manages a network of schools in Los Angeles Unified School District, launched a [summer melt pilot](#) during the pandemic in partnership with four local postsecondary institutions. A cohort of students received ongoing support (e.g. webinars, texting, virtual one-on-one meetings) from college success advisors hired through the Americorps VISTA program.

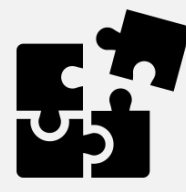
# Support for Indiana

# Key Priorities for Support



## Analyzing Data

- Analyzing 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholar data to understand gaps in Fall 2020 enrollment
- Identifying opportunities for outreach to 2020 graduates and support for 2021 graduates through Spring and Summer



## Focusing Outreach & Communications

- Helping students, families, and communities understand the benefits of postsecondary education and training
- Identifying the key steps for successful transitions and supports available to complete
- Prioritizing FAFSA



## Expanding Capacity

- Leverage lessons learned from 2020 COVID-19 Learning Support grants
- Identify opportunities for scaling summer supports for 2021 high school graduates
- Bringing additional resources to bear to support transitions

# Lessons from Summer 2020 COVID-19 Learning Support Grants

## Impact

- Programs offered a blend of academic, navigational, and relational supports to smooth transitions
- Led to increased feelings of preparation and for those that collected data increases in retention

## Feedback

- Desire for shared learning across sites
- Recruitment challenges – interest in additional support from state
- Student incentive(s) may be necessary to scale

## Options for the future

1. Re-launch grants with expanded state outreach support
2. Create a state-led, standardized program



## Grantees

Ball State University  
Coates, Inc  
Goshen College  
Indiana University Bloomington  
Indiana University Kokomo  
Indiana University Northwest  
Indiana University Southeast  
Ivy Tech Community College  
Marian University  
Notre Dame TRIO  
Purdue University Northwest

# Contact Us

Ryan Reyna

[rreyna@edstrategy.org](mailto:rreyna@edstrategy.org)

Lauren Norton

[lnorton@edstrategy.org](mailto:lnorton@edstrategy.org)



[www.edstrategy.org](http://www.edstrategy.org)  
<http://levelupcoalition.org/>



@edstrategygroup  
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# Additional Resources

## Harnessing Data

- [From Tails to Heads: Building Momentum for Postsecondary Success](#)
- [Harnessing the Power of Postsecondary Data](#)
- [4 For the Fall: Blueprint for Supporting the High School Class of 2021](#)
- [IN 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholars Milestones](#)

## Building Awareness

- [Future Focused TX Campaign](#)
- [NACAC Virtual College Fairs](#)

## Expanding Networks of Student Support

- [College Advising Corps Virtual Advising Guide](#)
- [ECS Policy Brief on State-Level Advising Network](#)
- [Education Trust NY Financial Aid Toolkit](#)
- [DCPS Persists Alumni Engagement](#)
- [Nashville Navigators](#)

## Addressing Academic Readiness

- [TN Tutoring Corps](#)
- [NC Education Corps](#)
- [NOVA Jumpstart Dual Credit Program](#)
- [HI Next Steps for Your Future](#)

## Increasing College Enrollment

- [CT FAFSA Completion Challenge](#)
- [Broward County Virtual FAFSA Events](#)
- [LA FAFSA Now Pilot](#)

## Tackling Summer Melt

- [NCAN Summer Melt Toolkit](#)
- [Tacoma Public Schools What's Next Initiative](#)
- [Springfield Public Schools To & Through Advising](#)
- [Rhode Island College Crusade](#)