

# How Can We Encourage Districts to Invest Forward?

## Guidance for Education Advocacy Organizations

High-quality postsecondary education is the ticket to long-term economic opportunity. Yet each year, far too many students—particularly students of color and from low-income families—are harmed by weak handoffs between K-12 and higher education systems.

And the pandemic has only exacerbated these systematic failures for our most vulnerable students:

**11%** ↓

in immediate undergraduate enrollment for 2020 high school graduates from high-poverty high schools

**15%** ↓

in year-over-year FAFSA completion rates for high school seniors in schools with high percentages of students of color

**50%**

of Hispanic high school seniors have changed their postsecondary plans

As districts and states work to invest forward with their American Rescue Plan (ARP) resources, we urge a deliberate focus on putting students on a path to economic mobility in high school. We recommend every community designate a sufficient amount of stimulus resources to shore up support for students in grades 9-12, accelerate postsecondary and career preparation, and ensure more equitable postsecondary access.

Every community should invest to help students: build college and career momentum early in high school; acquire knowledge, experiences, and relationships necessary for career success; earn college credit and/or stackable credentials before graduation; and, directly enroll in postsecondary education or training programs that lead to credentials with labor market value.

Advocates have a significant role to play in ensuring that districts and states are focused on the highest leverage, evidence-based investments for students. To ensure each and every student receives the support they deserve to excel beyond high school, we recommend the following actions:



**Use your voice.** Districts and states are required to gather community feedback on their spending plans. Make your voice heard about the need to invest in strategies that support students on their pathways to postsecondary and career success. A sample comment letter is available [here](#).



**Activate your networks and champions.** The more voices that are heard, the more likely that district leaders will feel pressure to invest in strategies that can lead to economic opportunity and mobility for students. Work with like-minded advocates, community-based organizations, higher education representatives, business and industry leaders, and other key champions to disseminate key messages and coordinate investment requests.



**Promote spending transparency.** Most of the district and state ARP spending plans that have been released are light on specific investment totals. Reporting on planned and actual expenses should be an expectation, not a nice-to-have. It will be critical for ensuring a return on investment that leads to direct improvements in postsecondary access and success, especially for Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous students and those from low-income communities.



**Lift up promising practices.** District and state leaders need examples of what's possible to help guide their decision-making. Advocates should point to voices and experiences from the field that demonstrate how a deep focus on supporting students' access to high-quality postsecondary pathways can pay long-term dividends.

The [Invest Forward site](#) has over 20 shovel-ready investment ideas that are backed by research and success in the field. These examples were crowd-sourced from some of the leading research and support organizations nationally, and are a great place to start. We will continue to highlight communities making wise investments and seeing positive outcomes in the months to come.