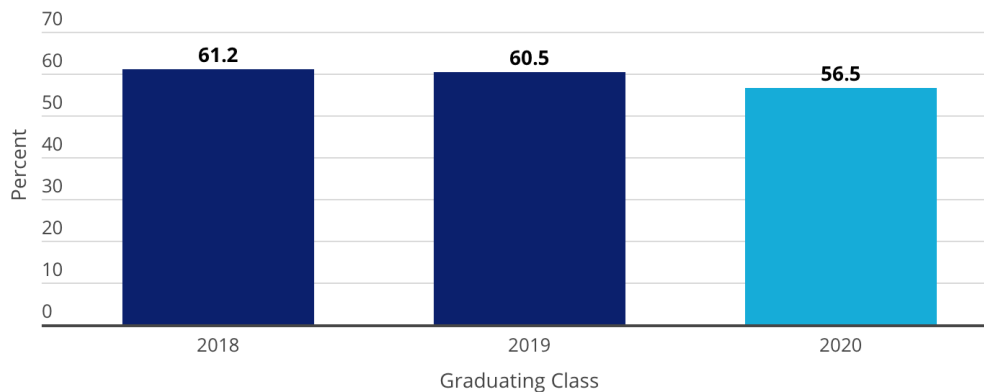


# How Can We Encourage Districts to Invest Forward?

## Guidance for Higher Education Leaders

The pandemic has dramatically disrupted the flow of students into higher education. College enrollments dropped 6.8% in 2020. Early data suggest this trend may continue through the 2021-22 academic year. Students of color and low-income students have fared the worst, with rates more than double their White and more affluent peers.

### Fewer Students Headed Straight to College Last Fall in the Midst of the Pandemic



SOURCE: National Student Clearinghouse

Both K-12 and higher education leaders want to address the disruption and setbacks the pandemic has caused young people and their families, communities, and schools. With greatly needed funding and additional supports on the way, there has never been a more important moment for partnership in strengthening P-16 pathways to meet the needs of all our students.

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. Higher education leaders can and should advocate for greater investment in proven strategies that support students in their final years of high school that can prepare them to take greater strides toward postsecondary success. The following page offers proven strategies to encourage better collaboration between K12 and higher education to support student postsecondary success.

**Near Peer Advising.** Near-peer advising leverages college students or recent college graduates to support high school students in developing and navigating their path to postsecondary education and training. Organizations, such as College Advising Corps, are placing well-trained, recent college graduates from one of their partner universities as full-time college advisers in high schools across the nation.

**Dual Enrollment.** Dual enrollment helps students from low-income backgrounds gain college credits while still in high school and thus save them time and money. K-12 and higher ed leaders have an opportunity to provide high school students access to much-needed mentoring, advising, career-connected learning, and early credential attainment. Students that engage in postsecondary coursework in high school are more likely to enroll, persist, and attain credentials of value--making it a win-win for students and institutions.

**Bridge Programs.** The pandemic has exacerbated the dilemmas of “summer melt” and preparation gaps for first-time college enrollees. Summer bridge programs can provide a throughline of support to students during the summer months to ensure they are able to navigate the transition and set foot on campus ready to succeed. K-12 and higher education can partner to promote, design, and execute programs that encompass academic (e.g. English and math instruction; tutoring), navigational (e.g. connection to on-campus resources; support with completing key actions; advising on course of study and career alignment; campus tours; financial aid and literacy), and relational components (e.g. cohort-based social activities; mentorship).

**Sharing postsecondary performance data with districts.** More than half of principals in a recent RAND study report having no access to data on their students’ postsecondary performance. Disaggregating data helps districts understand postsecondary outcomes by population, which they can use to identify gaps, highlight bright spots, and target student support. With this additional layer of data, schools can identify the highest-leverage opportunities for improvement and institutional leaders can partner to deliver solutions that make the transition between systems more seamless.

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