Expanding Data Use to Support More Effective Post-High School Transitions

Measuring Postsecondary Success in Promise Neighborhoods

Sonia Torres Rodríguez and Elizabeth Burton, Urban Institute ▪ December 2022

This brief focuses on Promise Neighborhood grantees that collect and report data on high school graduates who obtain a postsecondary degree, certification, or credential. It also explores strategies to assess the employment outcomes of youth in Promise Neighborhoods. It includes guidance and best practices on expanding data use and capacity for Promise Neighborhood grantees and peers to improve their measurement of postsecondary engagement and success.

Promise Neighborhoods is a federal U.S. Department of Education (ED) place-based initiative intended to turn neighborhoods of concentrated poverty into neighborhoods of opportunity. The program, which began in 2010, fosters a multitude of cradle-to-career initiatives across the nation dedicated to building supports or achieving outcomes for all families, children, and youth in a neighborhood.

One of the many goals of the program is to boost the number of high school graduates who overcome concentrated and intergenerational poverty and achieve postsecondary success, whether in a career or continued education. This goal is measured with federally mandated population-level data sources that capture the total number of high school graduates who obtain a postsecondary degree, certificate, or credential. Grantees are also encouraged to track progress toward this goal by collecting program-level data and indicators that assess the effectiveness of services that support youth and families during the complex post-high school transition.

Redefining Postsecondary Success

Postsecondary success is defined by the Promise Neighborhood Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) indicators as enrollment in and completion of 4-year, 2-year, or vocation programs (see table 1). This definition of success after high school does not account for the increasingly complex set of decisions high school graduates and their families face. The definition, measurement, and tracking of postsecondary success should be expanded to be more student-centered and market-driven.

Current return on investment for college degrees is lower than before because of higher cost of living, more student debt, and stagnant wages. College costs and student loan debt burdens have skyrocketed in recent years. Between 2006 and 2016, college sticker prices rose by 22 percent, and 4-year-college student debt rose even higher to 45 percent (Dorn, Dua, and Law 2020). The student loan debt burden is not shared equally, with 33 percent of Black bachelor's degree recipients accumulating $40,000 or more in student loan debt, compared with the overall rate of 18 percent of college graduates accumulating the same student loan debt (Baum 2019).

In part because of rising costs, student loan burdens, and economic pressures, students are not completing their college degrees at high rates, which means their return on the decision to go to college is lower. Up to 39 million Americans dropped out of college in July 2020; these individuals are 19.6 percent more likely to be unemployed than any degree holder (including associate's degrees) and have an average income 32.6 percent lower than bachelor's degree holders (Hanson 2022). Hispanic/Latinx students face the highest college dropout rate, with 12 percent of Hispanic/Latinx students failing to complete a bachelor's degree in 2014, compared with 7 percent of Black students, 5 percent of White students, and 1 percent of Asian students (Krogstad 2016). Evidence suggests dropout rates are largely driven by high costs, and high postsecondary costs disproportionately affect students from families with low incomes (Bennett 2003).

For these reasons, lower cost 4- and 2-year degrees and nondegree credentials are increasingly common. Approximately one in five working-age adults have completed a nondegree credential and report it as their highest level of education (Hanson 2021). The market has a wide array of nondegree credentials available, with over 900,000 unique nondegree credentials reported in 2019, including occupational licenses, registered and unregistered apprenticeships, online course certificates, and coding bootcamps (Credential Engine 2021).

Associate's degrees and nondegree credentials result in higher annual median earnings ($50,000) compared with earnings of those who only complete high school ($32,000) (Hanson 2021). The annual median earnings for a bachelor's degree holder are still higher, at $75,000, but that does not account for the cost of attending a 4-year college or university or potential risk of noncompletion (Hanson 2021). The rate of Black students holding no debt is higher in associate's degree programs (33 percent) and certificate programs (17 percent) than in bachelor's degree programs (14 percent) (Hanson 2022).

The landscape of postsecondary success has changed. While bachelor's degree completion is still a viable and valuable path to improving economic outcomes, it is just that—only one of the many paths students may choose. Because of rising costs and loan debt burdens, 4-year college completion may not necessarily lead to improved lifetime earnings for each individual, especially for Black and Latinx students.

The definition and measurement of postsecondary success should continue considering college enrollment as one important potential outcome—but not as the end goal in achieving postsecondary success. Instead, the end goal to measure is the level of economic independence and economic mobility young people in the Promise Neighborhood footprint are

able to achieve. This includes improving measures of completed apprenticeships and nondegree credentials, creating new measures to track the monetary and nonmonetary costs associated with 4-year college degrees, and developing new measures of employment and income of Promise Neighborhood high school alumni. With improved data, measurement, and assessment of postsecondary success, it can become more student-centered and market-driven. Rooted in Results-Based Accountability™, many Promise Neighborhoods use a step-by-step process to "Turn the Curve" on postsecondary indicators that were trending in the wrong direction (see box 1).

Box 1. Results-Based Accountability Exercise to Improve Postsecondary Data Trends

In 2021, Clear Impact and a subset of Promise Neighborhood grantees worked through a "Turn the Curve" exercise to explore why postsecondary-related data were trending down, below the targets grantees had set. Grantees identified a set of limiting and positive factors influencing the extent to which high schoolers can successfully transition out of high school.

Example Limiting Factors

- Cost of postsecondary education (families have trouble sustaining 4 years of funding or do not comprehend full cost of education)
- Lack of mentors, coaches, or high school counselors who dedicate enough time and energy to focus on postsecondary and career success
- Difficulty navigating the complex postsecondary system
- Student perceptions that they do not belong in college or lack of a confident career vision
- Family trauma, including citizenship documentation issues

Example Positive Factors

- Access to supportive services after high school to assist with students' transition
- High school culture of effective postsecondary transition
- Exposure to stories of postsecondary and career success, including through mentors, coaches, and college visits
- Better access to State and local scholarships

Promise Neighborhood grantees considered how to mitigate limiting factors and amplify positive factors in the evidence-based strategies they use. Because of complex competing factors that affect students transitioning out of high school, wraparound services need robust data systems to capture progress across time (as these factors shift) and expansive enough to capture the different paths students can choose (beyond pursuing college).

Source: Duncan 2021

Reporting on GPRA Indicators

The federal legislation associated with Promise Neighborhoods requires grantees to collect and report data on 10 GPRA indicators. This brief focuses mostly on GPRA 5, the postsecondary indicator for grants awarded in fiscal year (FY) 2017 or later. GPRA 5 includes measures of how many high school graduates obtain a postsecondary degree, certification, or credential. These measures require a combination of various data sources to ensure organizations can better capture outcomes in college, vocational program completion, and industry placement. Some of these data sources are discussed below. Whether in the Promise Neighborhoods context or in another place-based cradle-to-career approach, these data are important because they measure the effectiveness of services aiming to support youth and their parents in the transition from high school to a career.

Knowing the specifications of GPRA 5 is a starting place for accurate measurement. Each Promise Neighborhood identifies the population for these GPRA data, which includes high school graduates from target high schools and those served by the wraparound service ecosystem. Table 1 lists the four sets of measurements required under GPRA 5. The data for this GPRA need to be collected at the individual student level annually. The data must contain sufficient detail to be disaggregated by school and graduation cohort (or high school graduation year). The data must also include enough identifying information to be accurately merged with other relevant student-level data. Because these data contain personally identifiable information, grantees must follow proper data management and consenting procedures when acquiring, storing, and analyzing student records.

Table 1. Measuring Postsecondary Degree, Certification, or Credential Completion: GPRA 5 Reporting Guidance by Indicator

GPRA Indicator	Reporting Guidance
GPRA 5.1: Number and percentage of PN students who enroll in a two-year or four-year college/university after graduation	High school graduates from the target high schools should be tracked for up to 16 months post their high school graduation to determine whether they enrolled in community colleges, associate's programs, or four-year colleges or universities.
▪ **5.1a:** Number of students who enroll in college or university /number of students in graduating cohort	
GPRA 5.2: Number and percent of PN students who graduate from a two-year or four-year college or university or complete a vocational certification	This measure includes the number and percentage of former high school graduates from the target high schools who graduated from their post-secondary institutions (i.e., community college or associate's programs, four-year college and universities, and technical or vocational programs held separate from colleges or universities) within 100 and 150 percent of traditional completion time. The traditional length of time for associates degrees is two years after first enrolling (or 100 percent time). Students who complete in 150 percent of time will take three years.
▪ **5.2a:** (Number of students graduating with associates in two years) + (Number of students graduating with BA/BS in four years) / Number of students in graduating cohort	
▪ **5.2b:** (Number of students graduating with associates in three years) + (# students graduating with BA/BS in six years) / Number of students in graduating cohort	

GPRA Indicator	Reporting Guidance
▪ **5.2c:** Number of students graduated from vocation programs within 100% completion time / Number of students in graduating cohort	For four-year colleges and universities, 100 percent traditional completion time is within four years and completing with 150 percent translates into graduating six years after entering. For vocational and technical programs and certificates, the traditional length of time depends on the particular program.
▪ **5.2d:** Number of students graduated from vocation programs within 150% completion time / Number of students in graduating cohort	

Note: BA = bachelor of arts; BS = bachelor of science; GPRA = Government Performance and Results Act; PN = Promise Neighborhood

Source: Comey, J., Tatian, P., Freiman, L., Winkle, M., Hayes, C., and Franks, K. (2019). *Measuring Performance: A Guidance Document for Promise Neighborhoods on Collecting Data and Reporting Results.* Urban Institute. Retrieved December 9, 2022, from https://www.urban.org/research/publication/measuring-performance-guidance-document-promise-neighborhoods-collecting-data-and-reporting-results.

GPRA indicators track population-level trends, while program-level metrics are useful for service providers to track program participants, for example. Because provided services may not engage all graduating students, GPRA data collected for graduating cohorts should be accompanied by programmatic or case management data for students engaged in services. This data collection can serve to evaluate the effectiveness of high school transition services and contextualize the data obtained for the broader graduating cohort population.

To establish a commitment to results-based progress, ED also requires the selection of population-level targets in the first year of a Promise Neighborhood grant. These targets are meant to accompany the GPRA data in the annual reports and provide a helpful results-based accountability measure for grantees to use in their year-to-year planning. Promise Neighborhood grantees and their peers may consider the following best practices when setting targets:

- **Previous performance:** How have high school students in the schools of interest fared in their transition to college, certifications, vocational programs, or jobs in the past?

- **Performance levels achieved by other communities, school districts, or programs:** Can nearby schools or communities bordering the selected footprint inform the establishment of the target?

- **Standard set by previous research:** Is there a publication covering typical college, vocational program, or certification completion for high schoolers in similar communities?

- **A range, instead of a single value, as a target:** Ranges will vary widely by schools and communities, but including an upper or lower bound on expected outcomes of high school students after graduation can account for the high uncertainty and variability of the factors (beyond targeted services, such as entrenched poverty or an unpredictable variable like a pandemic) that may affect a high school student.

The collected GPRA data, once compared with the selected targets, are also evaluated for their strength and comparability each reporting year. To obtain a strong assessment, data must be collected to include graduates from all target high schools, and data (regardless of sample)

must cover at least 60 percent of the target high school graduate population. For GPRA 5.1, college enrollment must also be captured within the full 16 months after high school graduation. For GPRA 5.2, college degree, associate's degree, and vocational program completion must be captured for both the 100 and 150 percent of traditional completion time. Sections below provide a description of the typical data sources a place-based initiative might consider when measuring postsecondary success.

National Student Clearinghouse Data

The National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) is a nonprofit provider of educational reporting, data exchange, verification, and research services (NSC n.d.). The NSC data are currently the only national dataset of college enrollment and degree attainment, with relatively high levels of coverage of U.S. postsecondary institutions. Promise Neighborhood grantees typically register as StudentTracker customers, enabling them to submit a roster of graduates and receive a report with data on initial enrollment, persistence, and completion of the cohort they are attempting to track. Grantees have, to varying degrees, successfully used the StudentTracker Detail Report to meet their GPRA reporting requirements and track the college enrollment and degree completion for students from the high schools in their Promise Neighborhood footprint.

Promise Neighborhood grantees can request the StudentTracker Detail Report directly from NSC. The grantee organization or the school district or affiliated college/university (if not yet joined the Clearinghouse) should request a StudentTracker agreement form, fill it out, and return it.[1] A StudentTracker coordinator from NSC contacts the organization to provide instructions and authorize data access. After setting up the agreement, the grantee pays the StudentTracker premium annual subscription. A high school, school district, or Promise Neighborhood grantee organization subscription costs $595 per high school per year as of publication of this brief. For a college or university, the cost is based on the number of enrolled students at the institution. NSC datafiles are transmitted via a secure file transfer protocol account to the primary organization.

A more detailed postsecondary success and career data can help provide students and families still in high school with more information about the costs and benefits of specific colleges or careers, including information about declared major, type of degree earned, and student loan debt burden, to help them make a more informed decision. However, NSC data have a few limitations and are unlikely to provide the full scope of information grantees might want to provide to their graduating high school seniors. For example, NSC data include declared major and type of degree earned, but these data may not be comprehensive because colleges have to elect to participate in an NSC service titled "DegreeVerify" (Dynarski, Hemelt, and Hyman 2015). Students who transfer from a community college to a 4-year college or attend private institutions are less likely to be included in NSC, which creates a systematic data gap for two important student populations. Finally, student loan debt burden data are not available through NSC.

---

[1] The NSC website includes information about reading the StudentTracker report, understanding the subscription cost of colleges and universities, and subscribing to the StudentTracker for high schools or districts and colleges or universities.

Grantees seek to expand their postsecondary success measurement beyond meeting the GPRA reporting requirements, which may include information about students' experiences during their postsecondary education and their transition to a career; for many grantees, this will likely mean augmenting NSC data with other data sources.

Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems

Another potential source of data for GPRA 5 data elements is the Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS). The purpose of the SLDS is to integrate the individual student records across various data systems that track educational attainment for children in early learning programs through youth who enter the workforce. SLDSs integrate preschool, K–12, and higher education data systems and aggregate them into one data system. State education agencies (SEAs) typically fund SLDSs, and ED's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) SLDS grant program is designed to aid SEAs with their development and implementation.

In the past, Promise Neighborhood grantees had not been encouraged to consider SLDS because many of their states did not yet have an operational system in place. However, as table 2 shows, more states now are reporting operational SLDSs, including 11 out of 13 states where Promise Neighborhoods are located. Organizations interested in obtaining additional data could investigate the availability and quality of their state's SLDS by contacting their state education offices or NCES.

SLDSs have limitations. They typically have lower coverage for private institutions than NSC. As table 2 shows, only some of the states with reported functional SLDS have postsecondary or workforce core agencies. Grantees are advised to pursue both data sources; for those without postsecondary or workforce core agencies in their SLDS, this could be an improvement brought to the state.

Table 2. Active Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems in the States of Current Promise Neighborhoods (as of December 2021)

State	Promise Neighborhood (Year Grant Awarded)	SLDS Available	Early Learning	K–12	Postsecondary	Workforce
Alaska	Supporting Transitions and Educational Promise Southeast (STEPS) Alaska (FY 2017)	☑		● (red)	● (green)	● (blue)
California	Chula Vista (FY 2012)	☑				
	Everett Freeman (Corning; FY 2016)					
	Klamath River (FY 2021)					
	Mission (FY 2012)					
	San Diego (FY 2018)					
	South Hayward (FY 2017)					
Connecticut	North Hartford Ascend Pipeline (FY 2021)	☑	● (yellow)	● (red)	● (green)	● (blue)
Florida	Broward UP (FY 2021)	☑	● (yellow)	● (red)	● (green)	● (blue)
Indiana	IndyEast (FY 2021)	☑	● (yellow)	● (red)	● (green)	● (blue)
Kentucky	Knox (FY 2016)	☑	● (yellow)	● (red)	● (green)	● (blue)
	Perry (FY 2017)					
Maryland	Promise Heights (FY 2018)	☑	● (yellow)	● (red)	● (green)	● (blue)
Michigan	Grand Rapids Southeast (FY 2021)	☑	● (yellow)	● (red)	● (green)	
Mississippi	Deer Creek (FY 2016)	☑	● (yellow)	● (red)	● (green)	● (blue)
	Indianola (FY 2018)					
	Leflore (FY 2021)					
New Jersey	Camden (FY 2016)	☑	● (yellow)	● (red)		
	South Ward (FY 2021)					
	South Ward Children's Alliance (FY 2017)					
Oregon	Albina-Rockwood (FY 2018)	☑		● (red)	● (green)	● (blue)
Pennsylvania	West Philly (FY 2016)	☑	● (yellow)	● (red)		
South Carolina	Lancaster (FY 2021)					

Note: FY = fiscal year; SLDS = Statewide Longitudinal Data System

Source: Education Commission of the States. (2021). Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems. Retrieved from https://reports.ecs.org/comparisons/statewide-longitudinal-data-systems-2021-03.

Alumni Surveys

Alumni Surveys, or surveys that target high school graduates in the Promise Neighborhood footprint, have not been commonly used by grantees. In recent history, only two grantees, the Center for Family Services (FY 2018) and the University of Maryland School of Social Work (FY 2018), included Alumni Surveys in their data plans. However, more grantees may consider including postsecondary success questions in alumni or other surveys to supplement postsecondary success data collection, both to meet the GPRA reporting requirements and to more comprehensively assess the impact of postsecondary programs.

For FY 2017, FY 2018, and FY 2021 Promise grantees, only GPRA 9 requires a Neighborhood Survey, measuring family and community support for reading and talking about the importance of college and career. Notably, Neighborhood Surveys do not typically include items about degree enrollment and completion or other measures associated with postsecondary success. These postsecondary items may be absent because they have not been mandated. Another reason may be the high quality standards for Neighborhood Survey data: Survey data are considered valid, replicable, and reliable when they meet a 80 percent response rate and follow consistent methodology over time (Franks, Oo, and Tatian 2015). As a result, grantees may hesitate to add a new item to assess postsecondary activities such as "graduated dependent" on a Neighborhood Survey.

Although not mandated, new grantees establishing a Neighborhood Survey for the first time may consider including items that capture enrollment and completion for 4-year degrees, associate's degrees, vocational programs, nondegree certifications, or apprenticeships for respondents living in the Promise Neighborhood footprint. For Promise Neighborhoods that invest in robust survey data collection capacity and seek to reduce data collection burden on their families, adding questions to the Neighborhood Survey may be a successful strategy.

To meet the requirements for a strong rating for GPRA 5 reporting, in addition to tracking data on over 80 percent of high school graduates in the Promise Neighborhoods and following the guidance in table 1, the questions must be worded to distinguish between all working-age adults and those who graduated from a high school in the Promise Neighborhood footprint. One way to measure this distinction is to add current education and employment status to a household roster that typically includes questions about age, sex, gender, and relationship to head of household. This approach may aid efforts to track students who move out of the Promise Neighborhood geography for school; families of recent high school graduates may be able to provide information about adult children on the roster to facilitate data collection for recent graduates who moved out of the area.

Creating a standalone Alumni Survey may be another strategy grantees consider to capture richer and more specific data on postsecondary success. Although this strategy would require the creation and administration of a new survey, a new targeted survey may lead to more nimble and accurate outreach to Promise Neighborhood alumni, especially those who move out of the footprint to pursue postsecondary degrees or careers. This strategy may be more

successful for some Promise Neighborhood grantees because it may more closely align with their postsecondary success program administration. The success of an Alumni Survey relies on many factors, the most important being the strength of relationships grantees have with graduating high school seniors. For those Promise Neighborhoods that have created mentorship, support, and follow-up opportunities with high school seniors, outreach contact information may be more available and current, facilitating in-person, phone, or email outreach for Alumni Survey data collection. Box 2 contains a case study on specific wording of high school Alumni Survey questions to capture information of interest.

Box 2. Case Study: Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships High School Alumni Survey

The National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) uses high school alumni surveys to support its mission of ensuring college courses offered in high schools have a comparable rigor to those offered at a sponsoring college campus. NACEP encourages all accredited colleges and associated high schools to complete a high school student alumni survey for students 1 and 4 years out of high school.

NACEP has published a sample of its student alumni survey, which may be a helpful reference for Promise Neighborhood grantees looking to field the Alumni Survey. The survey includes questions translatable to the GPRA reporting Promise Neighborhood context. For example, the NACEP alumni survey asks:

Please describe what you are currently doing (select one option):	
I am continuing my education in a:	I am not currently continuing my education. I am:
○ Career School or College, or an Apprenticeship Program ○ Public 2-Year Community or Technical College ○ Private 2-Year Community or Technical College ○ Private 4-Year College or University	○ Serving in the Military or other National Service ○ Employed Part-Time, Full-Time, or Self Employed ○ Caring for a Home/Family ○ Unemployed ○ Other: _____

The Alumni Survey can also be an opportunity to collect some data on the effectiveness of cradle-to-career wraparound surveys. For example, the NACEP alumni survey includes a set of Likert scale questions:

- I was better prepared academically for college [as a result of the program]
- I developed more realistic expectations about college [as a result of the program]
- I was more confident about my ability to succeed in college [as a result of the program]
- Considered, for the first time, enrolling in college [as a result of the program]
- Improved my study skills [as a result of the program]
- Improved my time management skills [as a result of the program]

This question could be expanded to also capture the effectiveness of the Promise Neighborhood services in developing workforce readiness skills.

Source: National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships. (n.d.). *NACEP Student Alumni Survey Essential Questions.* Retrieved from https://nacep.org/docs/accreditation/institute/EvaluationSurveys.pdf.

Data Collection and Reporting Challenges

Not surprisingly, collecting data on the postsecondary success of students after their high school graduation poses significant data collection and reporting challenges. As table 3 illustrates, part of the challenge lies in identifying and integrating reliable student-level data that matches an expansive definition of postsecondary success—in other words, data that can speak to a wide variety of outcomes, including college enrollment, certification completion, and high-quality job attainment. This section highlights challenges and potential solutions related to data collection and reporting.

Challenge 1: Lack of Longitudinal Data Options

The 2008 reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act prohibits a federal database of personally identifiable information tracking students over time, thus making state governments and nonprofit stakeholders responsible for the collection of longitudinal student-level data.

Potential Solutions

Enroll with NSC to collect student-level data	Contribute to state's SLDS	Explore the viability of Alumni Survey

Challenge 2: Varying Data Quality Across Institutions

State-level systems are often limited to tracking data from in-state public institutions and unable to track data from private or out-of-state public institutions. This means high school students who pursue private or out-of-state public institutions for college might be missing in existing datasets. Transfer students are more likely to have incomplete data, where a student's record does not include previous high school or community college enrollment once they matriculate at a 4-year college.

Potential Solutions

Develop strategies to stay in contact with graduating high school seniors (either through Alumni Survey or less formal means)	Consider expanding Neighborhood Survey to ask parents about their graduating children and whether they are enrolled in private institutions or have transferred recently

Challenge 3: *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act*

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) protections might pose another data acquisition challenge. If a student places a FERPA block on their records and does not consent to providing access to their data, they will not be included in the available datasets.

Educate graduating seniors about pros and cons of sharing their educational data	Hold data walk with graduating seniors to show them the value of Promise Neighborhoods data

Challenge 4: Variations in Noncollege Path Data Collection

Grantees encounter data acquisition challenges for certification, apprenticeship, or job completion, primarily because of fewer state-level or nonprofit efforts at centralizing alternative certifications or job placements at the student level.

Potential Solutions

Connect with state's department of labor to develop individual-level employment and certification data (see more details in the Beyond GPRA Measurements section) to link with college enrollment and completion data sources	Develop data-sharing agreements with apprenticeship, workforce development, and certification providers

Challenges 5: Data Integration

In the absence of high-quality student name, date of birth, and high school name data, linking student records across various variables or time periods can be challenging. Not only can misspelled or changed names prevent a query from finding a student in a dataset, but the lack of consistent name or date of birth can lead to improper merges across datasets, with information from the same student unable to be linked.

Potential Solutions

Develop annual data quality process to flag missing or discrepant student data, especially prior to high school students graduating	Develop strategies to stay in contact with graduating high school seniors to identify and document name changes

Challenge 6: Cost

To be an NSC StudentTracker customer, a backbone organization must pay a $595 annual subscription per high school in the Promise Neighborhood footprint (DeBaun 2021). This challenge can become more pronounced after a Promise Neighborhood's funding ends.

Potential Solutions

Incorporate cost into Promise Neighborhoods budget	Work with Promise Neighborhood partners, including state's department of education, target high schools, and key colleges to distribute NSC cost (potentially through data sharing)

Challenge 7: Underdeveloped Partnerships

Lack of strong partnerships with target high schools and common colleges students attend can make it difficult to obtain NSC data.

Potential Solutions

Work with state's department of education to involve nonparticipating high schools or colleges into collaboration with NSC	Develop partnerships with nonprofits that can provide introductions to key schools and colleges

The complexity of data acquisition challenges may require multiple and overlapping solutions. This lack of clarity can make it difficult to discern the reason(s) a student is missing or absent from data. Is it because they did not enroll in college? Because they enrolled in a private school or a school out of state? Or because they placed a FERPA block on their records? This lack of information complicates the linking of data sources. Overcoming these linking challenges is important to meet GPRA requirements and effectively evaluate the success of postsecondary support programs.

Beyond GPRA Measurements

The required GPRA measures are important for tracking the success of Promise Neighborhood programs and services. However, other data options detailed below help grantees track and understand the economic conditions for Promise Neighborhood students. Promise Neighborhoods, along with other career and college organizations, should use evidence-based tools to ground career and college opportunities in the current job and labor market.

Data on Economic Outcomes for Promise Neighborhoods Alumni

Although GPRAs 5.2c and 5.2d measure completion of vocational or professional certifications, there are no standard criteria on reporting these data because of lack of comparable data sources on these outcomes (for example, average completion timelines differ greatly among

programs). Similarly, Promise Neighborhoods do not have standard criteria on economic outcomes data, in part because no GPRAs are associated with employment outcomes. Still, economic outcome data and measurement of the different pathways Promise Neighborhood high school graduates follow to reach successful employment and career outcomes are critical to understand how Promise Neighborhood graduates fare after high school.

Examples of economic outcomes data follow:

- Unemployment rate

- Median earnings or income

- Employment sector

- Types of employment (full time, part time, salaried, nonsalaried)

- Rate of business ownership or entrepreneurship

- Homeownership

- Amount of household debt

Historically, these data have not been prioritized in the Promise Neighborhoods context. Existing federal data from the American Community Survey, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the Survey of Economics and Decisionmaking can be a good first step in developing a baseline of economic outcomes in the Promise Neighborhoods footprint, at either the ZIP Code or block group level.

In the context of place-based initiatives, it is important to go one step further and add individual-level data. Promise Neighborhood grantees are uniquely positioned to lead these individual-level data collection and integration tasks in their role as intermediaries between local and state-level actors. As mentioned above, one option could be to collect data from Neighborhood or Alumni Surveys, which could be shared and analyzed with support from workforce and postsecondary partners. Another option could be to collaborate with partners that collect city- or state-level economic data. One grantee, Supporting Transitions and Educational Promise Southeast (STEPS) Alaska (FY 2017), has been working with the state's department of labor and local school districts to link NSC data with employment data and build a population-level estimate of economic outcomes.

Grantees could also leverage their preexisting connections with apprenticeship, vocational, nondegree certification, and workforce development programs to begin building a local database of employment and economic programmatic outcomes. Depending on the success of this data linking, these programmatic outcomes could capture a large proportion of the high school alumni population.

In parallel to the GPRA that includes degree and nondegree certification enrollment and completion, grantees looking to expand their economic outcomes data may consider several variations. For example, associate's degree or 2-year vocational program completion is currently measured at the 100 percent or 150 percent of traditional completion time—in other words, at

the 2- or 3-year mark. Similarly, economic outcomes data could be measured 5 and 10 years after high school graduation (or other time variations that make sense within the local context).

Overall, economic outcomes data, although not required by GPRA reporting, are exceedingly valuable and potentially worth embedding in a community's Scorecard data portal.

College and Career Readiness Programs

An increasing number of students are interested in entering the workforce rather than attending a 4-year university for a variety of reasons, including the economic strain of college debt and their current financial situation. Students' interests and voices should be at the center of career and college decisionmaking. This section provides suggested guidelines and best practices for college and career readiness programs, including examples from two Promise Neighborhoods: Hayward and Broward UP.

Many students in high schools are already in an adult role at home, including caregiving for younger family members and working paid jobs. The traditional high school system is structured without these responsibilities in mind. Time-sensitive graduation benchmarks and structured time periods in school days limit students' flexibility in completing credits. Career and technical education is often unpaid, which limits students' ability to participate, particularly students of color and students from families with low incomes. High schools and programs should consider the following strategies to support these students while encouraging career alignment:

- Allow flexible scheduling during school days.
- Validate student work experience with academic credit.
- Offer different school models for working students and students dually enrolled in college courses.

Paid youth apprenticeship programs and employment programs alongside these structured changes could benefit students' career trajectories. Many states also have apprenticeship programs Promise Neighborhoods could leverage. In addition to partnering with local businesses and industries to offer paid employment programs to youth, the following U.S. Department of Labor apprenticeship tools may help local programs align with federal initiatives:

YouthBuild
Community-based preapprenticeship programs for individuals aged 16–24 who previously dropped out of high school

Job Corps
A program for individuals aged 16–24 to complete high school, train for careers, and obtain employment

Apprenticeship USA
A program that connects career seekers, employers, and education partners with apprenticeship resources

Grantee Spotlight: Broward UP Promise Neighborhoods

Broward UP believes college is not for everyone, but education is, and all Broward County residents should have connection to education opportunities. Broward UP works directly with Broward College and other community partners on the Employment Management Program for Labor Opportunities that Yield Success (EMPLOYs) model. The EMPLOYs model seeks to align resources across the college and the community to collaborate rather than duplicate services. This model focuses on the six ZIP Codes with the lowest employment rates. The first goal is to recruit 2,500 community members by going to community events and working with residents at the Broward Campus YMCA. Staff also provide individual career training and coaching at high schools across the six ZIP Codes. The second goal is to engage 400 residents in free course offerings, including project management and truck driving training, among others. The third goal is for 300 residents to be placed into jobs and apprenticeships based on relationships built with employers across sectors.

To track and analyze postsecondary data, particularly for GPRAs 5.1 and 5.2, Broward UP subscribes to Naviance, which includes access to NSC data. For district-level data, Broward UP's data team combines the numerator and denominator from all target high schools. To include three local technical colleges that do not participate in NSC data collection, Broward UP works with them individually to understand enrollment and completion of certificate programs. Broward UP also conducts an annual graduate survey of 12th-graders across the district. This survey includes all types of postsecondary plans for students and helps gauge the results of Broward UP's postsecondary programs. These data are collected at the school and individual levels and stored in the school-level data system and case management systems.

Grantee Spotlight: Hayward Promise Neighborhood

Hayward Promise Neighborhood (HPN) pivoted during its grant to implement career coaches in high schools and shift its postsecondary systems to better support students. For students who go to college, success coaches work to cultivate a relationship to help navigate college and to graduate, particularly for students who may not have access to family members who attended college. Success coaches help provide resources and informed decisions for students based on school-level data on the individual student.

HPN found it difficult to track students who go to higher education institutions. To address this issue, the grantee created a population-level dashboard with data on California State University and Chabot College students. Users can track students who graduated from HPN high schools and attend these postsecondary institutions using demographic, enrollment status, major, grade point average, and retention data. HPN partners that collected these data instituted one-on-one requirements and data-sharing agreements to create the dashboard. Box 3 includes education and employment data tools from HPN's dashboard, which other grantees may use as a starting point for integrating key data for their communities.

Box 3. Education and Employment Data Tools

With the increase in student debt coupled with stagnant wages, students need to better understand the full economic picture when making career and college decisions. The following tools could help Promise Neighborhood grantee staff, including career and college success coaches in Promise Neighborhood schools and programs, show students various economic options that align with their interests.

Tool	Source	Description
O*Net Career Exploration Tool & Occupation Data	DOL	▪ Potential careers mapped to interests ▪ Profile of occupations, including needed education, salary distribution, and job demand ▪ Useful for parents and family members in Promise Neighborhoods
Out of Reach: The High Cost of Housing	NLIHC	▪ Tool to compare cost of renting one-bedroom or studio apartment in specific geographic area
College Scorecard	ED	▪ Detailed Information on institutions that qualify for student loan data ▪ Ability to compare across state and ZIP Codes, including admission rates and graduation rates ▪ Missing data for some small programs
Get My Future	DOL	▪ Youth-facing portal with variety of links to ideas and resources
Training Provider Results	DOL	▪ "College Scorecard" of training programs ▪ Programs completion and employment rates

Note: DOL = Department of Labor; NLIHC = National Low Income Housing Coalition;
ED = Department of Education

Conclusion

By improving data, measurement, and assessment on postsecondary outcomes, Promise Neighborhoods are better equipped to become more student-centered and understand students' economic independence and mobility. While bachelor's degrees are a valuable postsecondary path for students regardless of their socioeconomic and racial backgrounds, some students' career trajectories may not require bachelor's degrees. To expand the concept of postsecondary success, this brief summarized the various avenues for reporting on required GPRA data, suggested other indicators to track, and explored data tools and programs Promise Neighborhoods could use for students' postsecondary success.

This brief recommends using three data sources to report GPRA 5 measures for Promise Neighborhoods: (1) NSC, (2) SLDS, and (3) Alumni Surveys. Grantees most commonly use NSC's StudentTracker Detail Report to meet GPRA reporting requirements. To expand postsecondary measurements, some grantees also collect data on declared majors, types of degrees earned, and student loan debt burden from an NSC service called DegreeVerify. Grantees are increasingly using SLDS as more states implement these systems. SLDS integrates individual student records across data systems. The Alumni Survey or expanded Neighborhood Survey

could include questions related to postsecondary education and career outcomes based on GPRA requirements and provide a more comprehensive understanding of Promise Neighborhood programs' outcomes.

Promise Neighborhoods could track other economic outcomes to better understand if their programs and practices are shaping their alumni's long-term economic stability. Evidence-based tools could be used to enhance postsecondary programming. To improve these GPRA measurements and economic outcomes, Promise Neighborhoods could employ a variety of career and college readiness approaches. For example, they can use online public apprenticeship and paid employment opportunities for students, implement a college coach program (highlighted in Hayward's example), use evidence-based tools to provide options to students, or employ a program from recruitment to job placement with community partners (as Broward UP's program showcased).

Promise Neighborhoods can improve their students' postsecondary success by collecting and sharing the best data possible with key parties in their Promise Neighborhoods communities, including graduating seniors and their families. Reporting the required GPRA measurements provides essential information about the pathways high school graduates choose and complete. Going beyond the GPRAs to understand and promote postsecondary paths that align with students' interests, market needs, and the projected economic stability of careers unique to Promise Neighborhood communities may help grantees move the needle on the economic mobility of their graduating seniors.

References

Baum, S. (2019). *Student Debt: The Unique Circumstances of African American Students*. Urban Institute. Retrieved November 3, 2022, from https://www.equityinhighered.org/resources/ideas-and-insights/student-debt-the-unique-circumstances-of-african-american-students/.

Bennett, R. (2003). Determinants of Undergraduate Student Drop Out Rates in a University Business Studies Department. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 27*(2): 123–141. Retrieved December 8, 2022, from https://doi.org/10.1080/030987703200065154.

Credential Engine. (2021). *Counting U.S. Postsecondary and Secondary Credentials*. Retrieved November 3, 2022, from https://credentialengine.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Counting-Credentials-2021.pdf.

Comey, J., Tatian, R., Freiman, L., Winkle, M., Hayes, C., and Franks, K. (2019). *Measuring Performance: A Guidance Document for Promise Neighborhoods on Collecting Data and Reporting Results*. Urban Institute. Retrieved December 9, 2022, from https://www.urban.org/research/publication/measuring-performance-guidance-document-promise-neighborhoods-collecting-data-and-reporting-results.

DeBaun, B. (2021). *Some NSC StudentTracker Fees to Increase; Here's What You Need to Know.* National College Attainment Network. Retrieved November 3, 2022, from https://www.ncan.org/news/559363/Some-NSC-StudentTracker-Fees-to-Increase-Heres-What-You-Need-to-Know.htm.

Dorn, E., Dua, A., and Law, J. (2020). *The rising toll of student debt: More than graduates can sustain?* McKinsey & Company. Retrieved November 3, 2022, from https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/the-rising-toll-of-student-debt-more-than-graduates-can-sustain.

Duncan, D. (2021). *Using Collective Impact to Drive Greater Postsecondary and Career Success.* Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/research/publication/using-collective-impact-drive-greater-postsecondary-and-career-success.

Dynarski, S., Hemelt, S., and Hyman, J. (2015). The Missing Manual: Using National Student Clearinghouse Data to Track Postsecondary Outcomes. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 37*(1_suppl): 53S–79S. Retrieved October 14, 2022, from https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373715576078.

Education Commission of the States. (2021). *Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems*. Retrieved November 3, 2022, from https://reports.ecs.org/comparisons/statewide-longitudinal-data-systems-2021-03.

Franks, K., Oo, E., and Tatian, P. (2015). *Preparing and Fielding High-Quality Surveys: Practical Strategies for Successfully Implementing Neighborhood and School Climate Surveys in Promise Neighborhoods.* Urban Institute. Retrieved October 14, 2022, from https://www.urban.org/research/publication/preparing-and-fielding-high-quality-surveys.

Hanson, A. (2021). *Examining the Value of Nondegree Credentials*. Strada, Center for Education Consumer Insights. Retrieved November 3, 2022, from https://cci.stradaeducation.org/pv-release-july-28-2021/.

Hanson, M. (2022). *College Dropout Rates.* Education Data.org. Retrieved November 3, 2022, from https://educationdata.org/college-dropout-rates.

Higher Education Opportunity Act, Pub. L. No. 110-315, 122 Stat. 3078 (2008). https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-110publ315/pdf/PLAW-110publ315.pdf.

Krogstad, J. (2016). *5 Facts About Latinos and Education*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved November 3, 2022, from https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/28/5-facts-about-latinos-and-education/.

National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships. (n.d.). *NACEP Student Alumni Survey Essential Questions*. Retrieved from https://nacep.org/docs/accreditation/institute/EvaluationSurveys.pdf.

NSC (National Student Clearinghouse). (n.d.). *About the Clearinghouse*. Retrieved October 14, 2022, from https://www.studentclearinghouse.org/about/.

About the Authors

Sonia Torres Rodríguez is a research analyst in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center at the Urban Institute. Torres Rodríguez applies quantitative and qualitative approaches to the study of policies and programs related to labor and housing markets. Their research interests include racial equity, neighborhood change, equitable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, equitable development, econometric analysis, and community-engaged methods. Torres Rodríguez also assists with the management of the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership, a network advancing the effective and equitable use of data and technology. Before joining Urban, Torres Rodríguez was a research fellow for Stanford's Center for Poverty and Inequality, supporting a national qualitative and ethnographic study of poverty and inequality in the United States. Torres Rodríguez graduated from Rice University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in mathematical economic analysis and will be graduating with a Master of Science in applied economics from Johns Hopkins University in May 2023. They were recently selected as a 2022 Research in Color mentee.

Elizabeth Burton is a research assistant in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center at the Urban Institute. Her interests include affordable housing, housing justice, and racial equity. Her past projects have analyzed local housing and economic development policies to examine the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre's effects on current wealth disparities. Burton graduated from Macalester College with a Bachelor of Arts in political science, minors in statistics and psychology, and a concentration in urban studies.

Acknowledgments

About Insight Policy Research

Insight builds on the strong foundation established in 2001—addressing issues affecting historically underserved and economically disadvantaged populations; providing rigorous research and evaluation support; effectively translating research into practice; and developing practical, user-friendly reports. Today, through a combination of researchers and technical assistance providers, Insight reaches thousands of policymakers, practitioners, educators, and beneficiaries of policies with state-of-the art data analytics and visualization, hands-on technical assistance, and expert policy analysis. In 2022, Insight became a wholly owned subsidiary of Westat.