

FIELD REPORT · 60-DAY IMPLEMENTATION DATA · MARCH 2026

# Expanding Advising Capacity Through AI

Early insights from CounselorGPT implementation — what happens when advising becomes always-on, data-rich, and student-centered.

**FOCUS AREA**

AI-Enabled College Access & Advising

**DATA WINDOW**

First 60 Days of Implementation

**AUDIENCE**

Funders · District Leaders · College Access Practitioners



**20 min**

per week, per student

vs. 41 min/year national average



**30%**

of usage outside school hours

Advising extends beyond the bell



**80%**

of student interests

Aligned to high-wage, high-growth careers



**600+ hrs**

cumulative advising hours

Generated in the first 8 weeks alone

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## A Structural Shift in How Advising Is Delivered

### THE FIELD CHALLENGE

The college access field has spent decades trying to improve advising outcomes while accepting a fundamentally broken premise: that advising is a scarce, human-capacity-limited resource, rationed by bell schedules and counselor caseloads averaging 400:1. This scarcity has been treated as a fixed constraint. It is not. CounselorGPT demonstrates that when the delivery model changes, the constraint disappears.

The first 60 days of CounselorGPT implementation provide strong early evidence that postsecondary advising outcomes can shift meaningfully when systems reorganize how time, information, and support are delivered to students. The magnitude of change observed in this pilot is not incremental; it reflects a **structural shift in advising access, engagement, and decision-making**.

Students are engaging for approximately **20 minutes per week** — compared to a national average of 41 minutes per year of traditional advising. In eight weeks alone, this has resulted in more than **600 cumulative hours of advising interaction**. This represents a shift from advising as a scarce, episodic resource to advising as a continuous, accessible process.

When students can engage at the point of need, they revisit decisions, explore alternatives, and build understanding over time. These early findings suggest that when advising access is expanded, students engage more frequently, more flexibly, and more strategically.

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*The primary constraint in advising has never been student motivation. It has been access. This pilot demonstrates what happens when that constraint is removed.*

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#### KEY FINDINGS & FIELD INSIGHTS

### What 60 Days of Data Reveal

Four findings emerge from early CounselorGPT implementation — each with distinct implications for the field and clear mechanisms of action.

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#### FINDING 1 OF 4

##### Advising Exposure Increased by Orders of Magnitude

## 20 min/week - vs. 41 min/year

Most notably, CounselorGPT is driving a substantial increase in advising exposure. In eight weeks alone, this has resulted in more than **600 cumulative hours** of advising interaction. This represents a shift from advising as a scarce, episodic resource to advising as a continuous, accessible process.

This finding reinforces a consistent conclusion from the advising literature — dosage matters — but extends it by demonstrating that technology can fundamentally alter the dosage ceiling, not just incrementally increase it.

**IMPLICATION FOR THE FIELD**

Increasing advising exposure should be treated as a primary lever for improving outcomes, not a secondary benefit. The primary constraint in advising is not student motivation — it is access.

**MECHANISM OF ACTION**

Removing scheduling and staffing constraints allows advising to scale from episodic to continuous. When students can engage at the point of need, they revisit decisions and build understanding over time.

**FINDING 2 OF 4****A Dual Engagement Model: Structured + Self-Directed**

## **71% in-school ▪ ~30% outside school hours**

While 71% of engagement occurs during school hours, approximately 30% takes place outside of school. This pattern reveals two complementary mechanisms: structured, in-school time ensures equitable access and initial adoption; once students experience value, a meaningful share re-engage independently.

This is a notable departure from traditional advising models, which are almost entirely bounded by school time and adult availability. Neither condition alone is sufficient — together, they enable both scale and depth.

**IMPLICATION FOR THE FIELD**

Embedding advising into the school day remains essential for equitable participation, but must be paired with tools that enable continued engagement beyond school hours. Neither alone is sufficient.

**MECHANISM OF ACTION**

Structured, in-school time ensures initial adoption. Voluntary out-of-school re-engagement signals that students have internalized the value of advising and seek it independently — a qualitative shift in behavior.

**FINDING 3 OF 4****Students Integrate Economic Data into Real-Time Decision-Making**

## **~80% of interests in high-wage, high-growth sectors**

Nearly 80% of student career interests align with high-growth and/or high-wage sectors, including healthcare, engineering, management, and life sciences. Students are not passively receiving information — they are actively comparing salary projections, affordability, and pathway options in real time.

High interest in healthcare, engineering, and management — alongside engagement with trades and certification pathways — indicates that students are not simply optimizing for prestige, but for a combination of opportunity, feasibility, and clarity. This is best understood as *informed self-direction*.

#### IMPLICATION FOR THE FIELD

Integrating clear, actionable economic information into advising is a high-impact strategy for improving decision quality and advancing equity. Students who otherwise undermatch can be meaningfully redirected.

#### MECHANISM OF ACTION

When labor market data and cost information are made salient at the moment of exploration, students integrate them into their choices — a shift from aspiration-only to aspiration + feasibility reasoning.

#### FINDING 4 OF 4

#### Implementation Quality Drives Outcome Variation

## Adult systems → Student outcomes

Student-level outcomes are not independent of implementation. Urban Assembly's structured rollout — combining staff onboarding, role-based access, training, and ongoing coaching — creates the conditions for consistent use. Schools that translate these supports into clear internal systems demonstrate higher adoption and deeper engagement.

Where these elements are absent or inconsistently applied, usage declines. Variation in outcomes is driven less by student characteristics and more by differences in adult system design. Technology can expand capacity, but it cannot compensate for weak organizational alignment.

**IMPLICATION FOR THE FIELD**

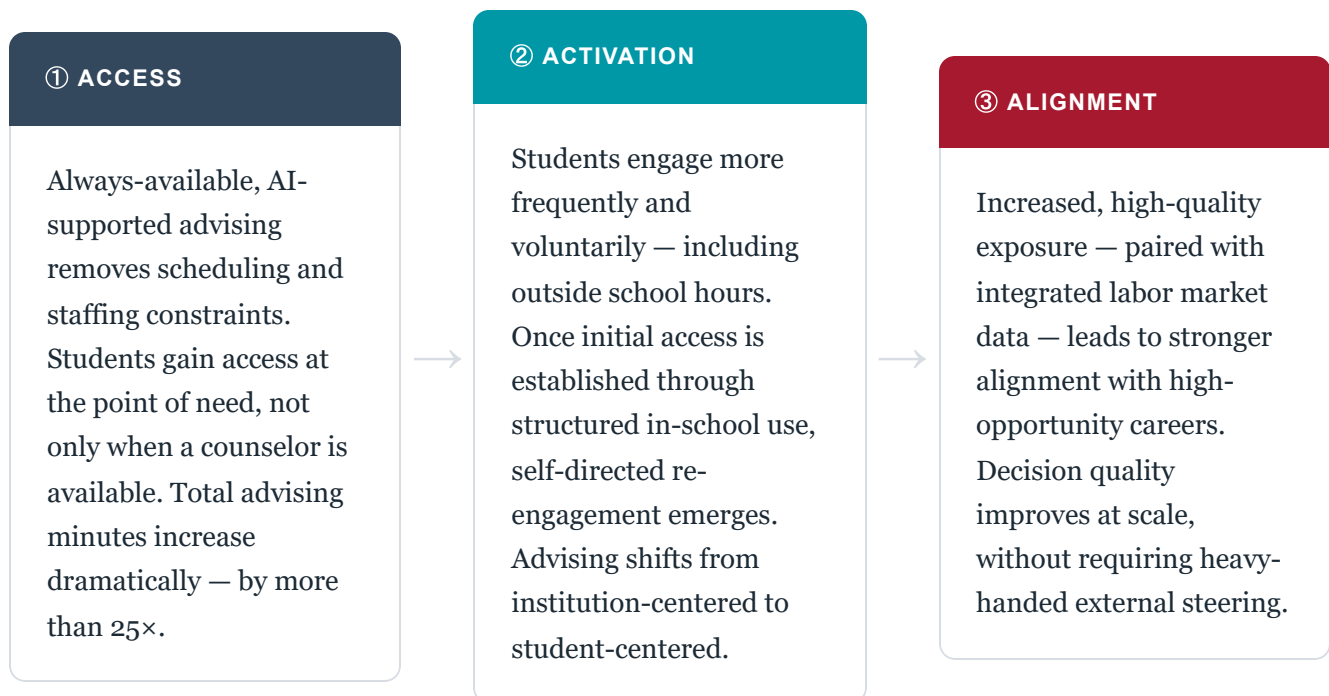
Scaling effective advising requires investment not only in tools, but in the organizational systems — staff roles, training, scheduling, and accountability — that determine whether those tools are used effectively.

**MECHANISM OF ACTION**

Defined ownership, full account readiness, and protected advising time are the structural preconditions for adoption. Tool quality is necessary but not sufficient — adult systems are the multiplier.

**NAMED FRAMEWORK****The Triple-A Framework: Access · Activation · Alignment**

Three sequenced stages explain how expanded advising capacity translates into improved student decision-making — and why each stage depends on the one before it.



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*When advising becomes always available, students engage more — and engage differently. They return to the work, interrogate their options, and make decisions that are more aligned with long-term opportunity.*

**VISUAL MODEL**

**Causal Logic Model: How CounselorGPT Drives Impact**

How structural inputs convert into measurable student-level outcomes through defined mechanisms.

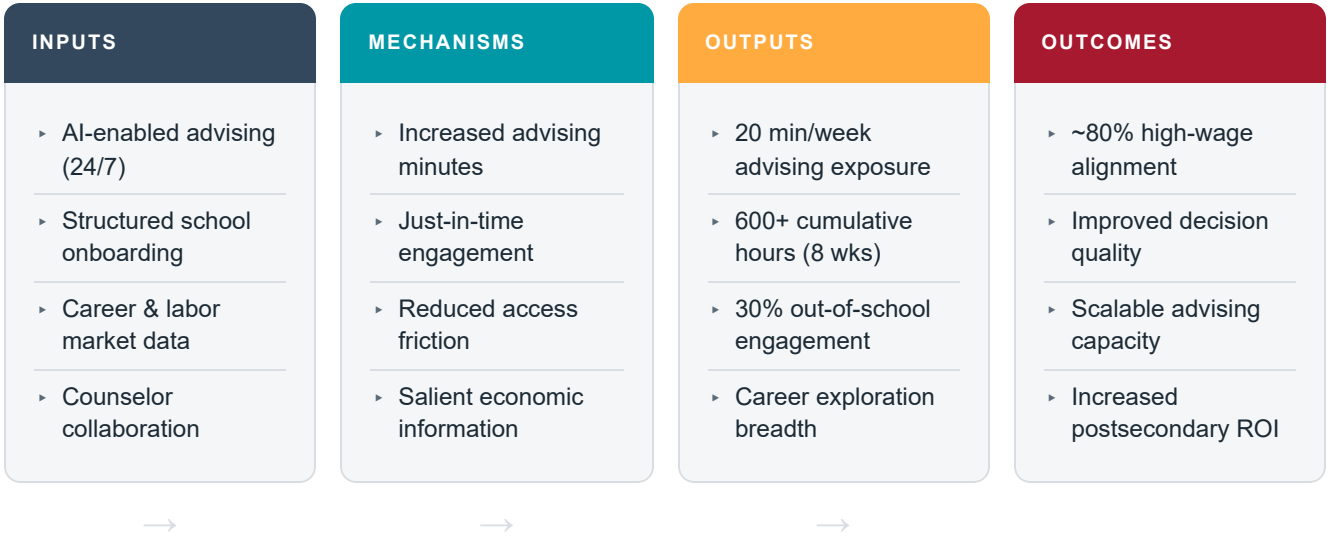


Figure 1. CounselorGPT Causal Logic Model. Arrows indicate directional relationships between program components and student-level results.

**MECHANISMS OF ACTION**

**How Impact Is Produced: Five Causal Chains**

Taken together, these findings point to a coherent set of mechanisms that drive impact. Click each to expand the causal chain.



## Increased advising dosage → More frequent and iterative decision-making

FRICITION REDUCTION

**Behavioral Science:** Friction reduction theory holds that behavior change is most reliably achieved by removing barriers rather than adding incentives. CounselorGPT eliminates scheduling friction — the single largest barrier to advising access — making engagement the path of least resistance rather than a deliberate effort.

When advising is no longer episodic, students return to the process repeatedly. Each return allows them to refine understanding, reconsider options, and build toward a decision rather than making a single high-stakes choice with limited information.

24/7 Access



Removed Friction



Repeat Engagement



Iterative Decision-Making



## Structured + self-directed engagement → Both equitable access and extended use

DEFAULT ENROLLMENT

**Behavioral Science:** Default enrollment effects — the well-documented tendency for people to comply with preselected options — ensure that structured in-school time functions as an opt-out system. All students receive initial advising exposure without requiring motivation or self-advocacy. Voluntary out-of-school use then reflects genuine internalization, not compliance.

Structured in-school time ensures all students — regardless of home environment or social capital — receive initial exposure. But voluntary re-engagement outside school hours signals something more: students have internalized the value of advising and seek it on their own terms.

School Integration



Guaranteed Access



Value Internalized



Self-Directed Use (30%)



### Economic transparency → Greater alignment with high-opportunity pathways

**INFORMATION SALIENCE**

**Behavioral Science:** Salience research demonstrates that information presented at the moment of decision — rather than in a separate, decontextualized session — is dramatically more likely to influence choice. CounselorGPT embeds earnings, demand, and cost data directly into the career exploration flow, making economic reasoning a natural part of the decision rather than a separate step.

When earnings, demand signals, and pathway costs are made salient at the moment of exploration — not presented later in a separate session — students integrate economic reasoning into their choices in real time. Information access, not preference, has been the binding constraint.

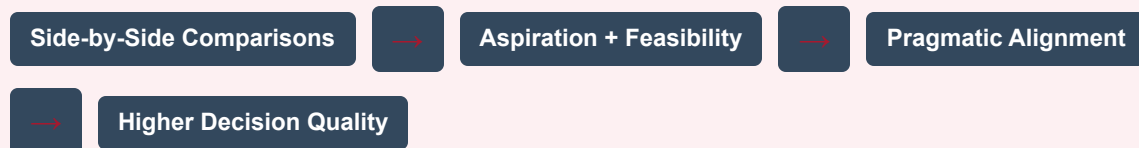


### Comparative decision tools → Higher-quality, tradeoff-informed choices

**CHOICE ARCHITECTURE**

**Behavioral Science:** Choice architecture research shows that structuring how options are presented — side-by-side, with standardized attributes — reduces cognitive load and improves decision quality. CounselorGPT functions as a structured choice environment, making comparison the default rather than a skill students must independently develop.

Students are not just selecting from a list of careers — they are comparing salary projections, affordability, time-to-credential, and pathway clarity side by side. This shifts decision-making from single-option evaluation to comparative analysis, producing choices that balance aspiration with feasibility.



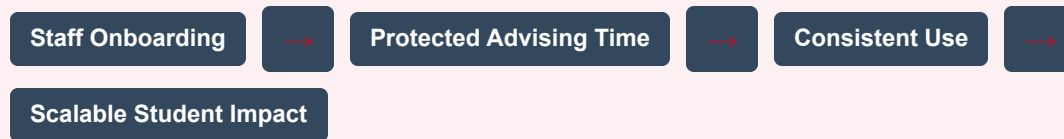


## Aligned adult systems → Consistent, scalable implementation

### IMPLEMENTATION DRIVERS

**Implementation Science:** The Active Implementation Frameworks identify competency, organization, and leadership as the three core implementation drivers that determine whether an innovation is used as intended. Schools where all three are present — trained staff, protected advising time, and designated ownership — show significantly higher adoption. The tool is constant; the driver is the adult system around it.

Technology is a necessary but not sufficient condition. Schools with defined ownership, full account readiness, trained staff, and protected advising time demonstrate significantly higher adoption and deeper engagement. Where adult systems are weak, tool impact attenuates — regardless of tool quality.



## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

### What This Means for Schools, Districts & Funders

For the college access field, the implications are significant. These findings point to concrete, prioritized actions at each level of the system.



#### For Schools

- Integrate advising tools into the school day to ensure equitable initial access
- Enable out-of-school access so students can continue on their own terms
- Treat advising as a continuous experience, not a one-time event



#### For Districts

- Shift from staffing-based models to capacity-based models of advising
- Track advising exposure (minutes/week) as a leading outcome indicator
- Invest in systems that scale access equitably across schools

→ Assign clear ownership — advising can't be everyone's and no one's job

→ Build data infrastructure to measure pathway alignment over time



### For Funders

- Prioritize interventions that increase advising minutes at scale
- Fund tools that embed actionable economic data into the advising moment
- Support the organizational systems — not just the tools — that drive adoption
- Measure advising exposure as a core metric in grant evaluation frameworks

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*AI does not replace counselors — it expands the system's total advising capacity. The question is not whether technology can help, but whether adult systems are designed to deploy it consistently.*

## RESEARCH AGENDA

### What We're Watching: The Next Phase of Evidence

Sixty days is a proof of concept, not a proof of impact. The questions that matter most for the field require longitudinal data. This is what we are tracking — and why it matters.

## 01

### **Does dosage predict postsecondary outcomes?**

We now know advising exposure has increased dramatically. The critical next question is whether increased minutes predict better enrollment, match quality, and persistence outcomes — and at what dosage threshold effects emerge.

OUTCOME VALIDITY

## 02

### **Does pathway alignment hold through application?**

Early career interest data show strong alignment to high-opportunity sectors. We are tracking whether this expressed interest translates into actual program applications, enrollment choices, and ultimately labor market entry — or whether it attenuates at each step.

BEHAVIORAL FOLLOW-THROUGH

## 03

### **Which implementation conditions matter most?**

Variation in adoption across schools points to adult system quality as the key moderator. We are building a readiness rubric that isolates which specific conditions — staff training, protected time, ownership structure — have the largest effect on student engagement.

IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE

## 04

### **Who benefits most — and are we reaching them?**

Equity requires more than universal access. We are analyzing engagement patterns by student subgroup to determine whether historically underserved students — first-generation, low-income, students of color — are activating at equal or higher rates, and what drives differential engagement.

EQUITY & DIFFERENTIAL IMPACT

05

What is the counselor experience?

CounselorGPT is designed to expand — not replace — counselor capacity. We are measuring how counselors are using the data generated by student interactions to deepen their one-on-one work, and whether the tool changes the nature of human advising conversations.

HUMAN-AI COLLABORATION

06

Can the model transfer across contexts?

Current implementation data come from Urban Assembly schools. As the model scales, we are studying whether the Triple-A pattern — Access driving Activation driving Alignment — holds across different district contexts, student demographics, and implementation fidelity levels.

EXTERNAL VALIDITY

RESEARCH GROUNDING

Connection to Established Research & Frameworks

CounselorGPT's early findings do not emerge from a vacuum — they confirm, extend, and in some cases complicate what the advising literature already tells us.

| RESEARCH AREA                                                                                                     | ESTABLISHED FINDING                                                                                                                        | HOW COUNSELORGPT EXTENDS IT                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Advising Capacity Constraints</b><br><i>ASCA, 2021</i>                                                         | National student-to-counselor ratios far exceed recommended levels, limiting advising frequency for most students.                         | CounselorGPT decouples advising exposure from counselor headcount, demonstrating a viable path to capacity expansion.              |
| <b>Advising Dosage &amp; Outcomes</b><br><i>Bettinger &amp; Baker, 2014</i>                                       | Increased advising interactions improve postsecondary enrollment and persistence outcomes, even through light-touch coaching.              | CounselorGPT shows that AI can shift the dosage ceiling — not just incrementally improve it — while operating at population scale. |
| <b>Information Gaps &amp; Undermatching</b><br><i>Hoxby &amp; Turner, 2013;</i><br><i>Hoxby &amp; Avery, 2012</i> | Students — especially high-achieving, low-income students — systematically undermatch due to lack of actionable postsecondary information. | When information gaps are addressed dynamically and at scale, student preferences themselves shift — not just their awareness.     |

| RESEARCH AREA                                                        | ESTABLISHED FINDING                                                                                                                | HOW COUNSELORGPT EXTENDS IT                                                                                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Weak Ties &amp; Economic Mobility</b><br><i>Granovetter, 1973</i> | Exposure to broader information networks — beyond immediate social circles — significantly improves economic opportunity.          | CounselorGPT functions as a weak-tie substitute: providing labor market exposure students would otherwise lack based on zip code or family background. |
| <b>Consistent, High-Quality Advising</b><br><i>NCAN, 2021</i>        | National standards emphasize consistent, actionable advising delivered at scale to all students, not only those who self-advocate. | CounselorGPT's structured + self-directed model operationalizes both consistency (guaranteed in-school access) and depth (voluntary re-engagement).    |

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College Access & Advising Innovation Series

Urban Assembly