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Tell us about something interesting you are working on right now at EducationCounsel.

EducationCounsel is currently working with the D.C. Office of the Deputy Mayor to address the issue of absenteeism in the D.C. School District. We are analyzing the effectiveness of various strategies and interventions in the K–12 setting to reduce absenteeism. Part of our analysis includes reviewing each agency’s unique approach to this issue. Our goal is to foster better collaboration and facilitate cross–agency learning. To this end, we support a task force led by the Office of the Deputy Mayor called “Every Day Counts.” This task force unites representatives from relevant government agencies and external partners, including nonprofits and

industry representatives. The aim is to advance a more unified approach to this challenge. Participating government agencies include the Child and Family Services Agency, Court Social Services Division, D.C. Public Charter School Board, D.C. Public Schools, and the Department of Behavioral Health.

One example of an intervention being tried by the city, as part of a broader category of family engagement strategies pursued by local leaders, is a “nudging” intervention. This involves [the schools] sending text alerts to parents when their student has an unexcused absence. Parents of frequently absent students also receive a letter detailing what their child has missed and offering resources to help get them back on track.

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How did you become interested in place-based issues?

My interest in place-based issues stemmed from my experiences in teaching and mentoring. Much of my policy analysis and evaluation work was at the national or state level, but I noticed there was space between those policies and the real-life conditions people face on the ground. Education, in particular, appeared highly relational and context-specific. I realized that community and environmental factors significantly affect teaching, learning, student success, and degree completion. Increasingly, I focused on how local actors could facilitate educational success and unite to overcome barriers students face. This has become a focal point of my career, and I'm grateful to continue this work at EducationCounsel.

How should states and localities be spending their money to promote place-based prosperity?

Two main points come to mind.

1. Data exchanges and data sharing are crucial. There's a need for ongoing investment in enhancing the robustness and impact of data-sharing agreements across sectors, particularly for underserved

and marginalized communities.

For example, systems that help stakeholders understand education trends, experiences, and outcomes across sectors, locales, and states, such as the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education's [Multistate Longitudinal Data Exchange](#), can help decision makers tackle some of our nation's most pressing developmental challenges.

2. During the pandemic and recovery period there were a range of publicly—as well as privately—funded targeted local programs to promote prosperity. I would like to see the most promising of these programs brought to scale and made permanent by state and federal leaders. These programs can be foundational to human thriving.

One such program I was involved with [when I was at the Kresge Foundation] eliminated metro transit fees for students living in the Los Angeles Community College district region. This program positively impacted student progression and degree completion and evolved into a two-year pilot funded by the city of L.A. using pandemic recovery funds. The program was expanded to include all students attending community college in the district and is still [ongoing](#). I hope we will see more permanent efforts along these lines