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Tell us about something interesting you are working on right now as a research scientist at the University of Pittsburgh.

My colleagues and I are continuing our ongoing work with the Pittsburgh Promise. We are currently in the third year of evaluating an embedded coaching program in which coaches paid by the Promise, not Pittsburgh Public Schools, are embedded in specific high schools where significant shares of students do not reach the eligibility threshold for the Pittsburgh Promise. Coaches conduct one-on-one meetings with students and try to build relationships with them. These coaches not only help students with things like college applications, but they also connect students to financial and social support services, help them think

through their postsecondary plans, and connect struggling students with tutors. As evaluators, our goal is to determine whether the coaching program is providing the necessary actions and support systems to help these students fulfill eligibility requirements. We are also documenting outcomes and analyzing patterns in the data to understand the program's overall effectiveness. We are researchers, but we try to come at our work from a utility mindset by using data to help guide program improvements. For example, our data indicate that early on in the coaching program, the students receiving the most coaching time are often those who need it the least, as

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they are already on track to qualify for the Pittsburgh Promise. To address this, we used our data to assist coaches in identifying and focusing on the student groups who have the greatest need for support and targeting their time to those groups.

How did you become interested in place-based issues?

I became interested in the study of place-based issues after the establishment of the Pittsburgh Promise. Initially, the Heinz Endowments, an early investor and supporter of the program, recruited my colleagues and me to assess its impact on the behaviors and decisions of students, parents, and teachers. Later, the Pittsburgh Promise administrative leadership team decided they wanted continuous evaluation of the program, reflecting their dedication to data-driven decision making and program adaptations. Thus, my longstanding role as an evaluator for the Pittsburgh Promise is at the root of my focus on place-based policy issues.

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

The costs of higher education have outpaced income increases in many places, making it increasingly difficult for young people to pursue postsecondary education. Leaders at the state and local level need to be proactive in addressing this. They need to consider the kinds of jobs that will emerge in their state over the next decade and the driving forces behind their economy. While policymakers often focus on short-term issues with immediate solutions, a shift toward the “long game” is crucial. This involves investing in an education system that is both robust and attuned to future workforce requirements. Such investment, though its benefits may not be apparent for years, is essential. If communities fail to proactively develop strong, sustainable, and accessible avenues for young people and others in the labor market to enhance their skills, they risk falling behind other regions that prioritize a long-term vision.

About the *Policies for Place* Advisory Network

The *Policies for Place* Advisory Network is an interdisciplinary group of experts in place-based policy. This network plays a pivotal role in ensuring that our research addresses key issues and generates meaningful outcomes. Additionally, advisors promote collaboration and facilitate connections with stakeholders, thereby enhancing the relevance and impact of our work. Members of the network help advance knowledge and drive positive change within the world of place-based policies.