

# Summer Melt Toolkit

Knowledge and Resources for  
Ensuring Students Arrive On  
Campus

Produced as part of the  
To & Through Advising Challenge  
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# Why Postsecondary Access & Success?

*Talent is everywhere, but opportunity is not.*

- The odds of a high-income student enrolling in postsecondary education directly after high school are **more than 3 times higher** than those of a low-income student.
- A high-income student is **more than twice as likely** to complete a postsecondary certificate or degree by age 26 as a low-income student.

Source: Education Pays 2016, p. 10 (College Board)

Source: Postsecondary Attainment: Differences by Socioeconomic Status (NCES, May 2015)

# NCAN's Member Footprint



# NCAN'S MISSION AND GOALS

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To build, strengthen, and empower education communities and stakeholders to close equity gaps in postsecondary attainment for all students.

**REALIZED BY**

**Goal 1:**

Promote high-quality services to support equitable outcomes for students

**Goal 2:**

Champion practice-informed federal and state policy

# WHAT IS THE TO & THROUGH ADVISING CHALLENGE

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- On-going project led by the National College Access Network and supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- 20 grantees aim to “change the way they do business around postsecondary advising” through four goals:
  - Incorporate fit and match into postsecondary advising
  - Increase access to financial aid by improving FAFSA completion
  - Reduce the harmful effects of summer melt
  - Accomplish the above through the strategic use of data

## WHAT IS THE TO & THROUGH ADVISING CHALLENGE

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- During the 2018-19 academic year, grantees developed implementation plans for accomplishing the project's goals. Starting in 2019-20, grantees will put these plans into place.
- Grantees receive funding for implementation, expert coaching on postsecondary advising and data use, NCAN memberships, targeted technical assistance, and opportunities to learn from each other.

## WHAT IS SUMMER MELT

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**Summer melt** is the phenomenon of college-intending students who have applied to, been accepted by, and made a deposit to a college or university, but **fail to matriculate** to that college (or any other) in the fall following their high school graduation.

## WHY IS SUMMER MELT IMPORTANT?

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- According to the Harvard Strategic Data Project (2013), summer melt impacts 10-40% of college-intending graduates.
  - Impacts vary widely by demographics
- The most disadvantaged students are the most susceptible to summer melt.



# WHO DOES SUMMER MELT IMPACT?

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- **Low-income students**
  - In Fulton County, GA, 37% low-income college-intending graduates melted while only 7% of non-low-income graduates melted
- **Students intending to enroll at community colleges**
  - In AZ, TX, NM, the melt for 2-year institutions was 37% and only 19% for 4-year institutions in 2011
- **First-generation students**
- **Students with lower academic achievements**
- **Students with atypical family situations**
- **Students of color underrepresented on college campuses**

## CAUSES & CHALLENGES

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- Difficulty navigating complex forms & processes
- Lack of financial literacy & financial aid gaps
- FAFSA Verification and "[Verification Melt](#)"
  - NCAN estimates that 50% of Pell-eligible students are flagged for FAFSA verification annually. ~25% of these students will fail to receive their Pell Grant.
- Lack of access to high-quality, professional assistance
- Lack of confidence and college knowledge

# HOW TO MEASURE SUMMER MELT

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## 1. Identify college-intending students

1. Administer an exit survey as close to graduation as possible
2. Offer incentive for survey completion or make survey a graduation requirement

## 2. Obtain college enrollment records from National Student Clearinghouse through [Student Tracker service](#)

1. Bonus move: Add data about student demographic characteristics, academic background to provide additional context to analysis

## 3. Calculate:

1.  $100 \times \left(1 - \frac{\text{\# of students enrolled}}{\text{\# of college-intending graduates}}\right) = \% \text{ of students melting}$

# KEY PLAYERS: STUDENTS & FAMILIES

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- **Students:**
  - Remain proactive!
  - Check emails & student portals consistently
  - Key message: don't be afraid to ask for help; plenty of it is out there!
- **Parents:**
  - Track students' completion of enrollment milestones
  - Advocate for students
  - Provide students with encouragement and affirm their decisions to pursue a postsecondary degree
  - Remind students to check their email & student portal

# KEY PLAYERS: HIGH SCHOOLS, COUNSELORS, & COLLEGE ACCESS PROGRAMS

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- Administer exit surveys to record students' postsecondary plans
  - Consider collecting these earlier in high school so these data are actionable and identify students for advising and support
- Schedule initial postsecondary advising sessions prior to graduation
- Help students review financial aid award letters and (if available) assess affordable options prior to graduation
- Host summer drop-in hours at school or in students' neighborhoods
- Advocate to institutions on students' behalf and form lasting partnerships
- Fill in student knowledge with access to resources and caring, expert adults
- Equip students with skills and confidence to troubleshoot and self-advocate

## **KEY PLAYERS: HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

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- Facilitate interdepartmental collaboration for at-risk students
- Maintain strong communication with high school counselors, students, and families (including over the summer prior to matriculation)
- Create opportunities for student and family summer engagement and orientation

# HOW TO FREEZE SUMMER MELT: STAFFING

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- *Extend counselor contracts for summer outreach*
  - **Pros:** High impact, personalized advising from personnel students trust
  - **Cons:** May require additional training for, buy-in from, counselors
- *Launch peer-led mentorship program*
  - **Pros:** Students can connect with their peers more easily
  - **Cons:** Requires management, supervision, and training of peer mentors
- *Partner with local college access program*
  - **Pros:** High impact, expert knowledge
  - **Cons:** Can be expensive, resource-intensive, need to put energy into developing and maintaining a partnership

# HOW TO FREEZE SUMMER MELT: NON-DIGITAL INTERVENTIONS

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- Create institution-specific transition “cheat sheets”
  - One-page summaries of all pre-matriculation tasks and deadlines to complete over summer
  - Include relevant links, web pages, and institution contact information
  - Create sheets for the most popular institutions amongst students (find this information via reports from the [National Student Clearinghouse’s Student Tracker for High Schools](#) service)



# HOW TO FREEZE SUMMER MELT: DIGITAL INTERVENTIONS

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- Technology:
  - Phone, email, text, Facebook, Twitter campaigns
    - Texting is most popular amongst students
- Tip: Accommodate student schedules
  - Send messages early afternoon through early evening
- Lots of research in the literature about texting interventions
- For more on this topic see [“Nudges, Norms, and New Solutions”](#)

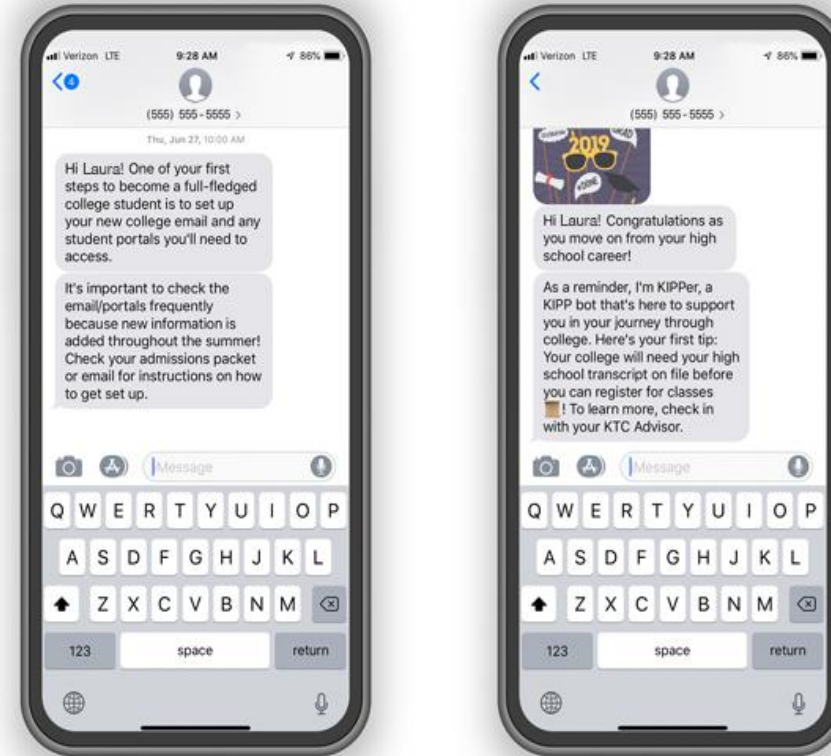
# BEST PRACTICES FOR TEXT-BASED OUTREACH INTERVENTIONS

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- Collect student name, intended institution, and cell phone number through exit survey, registration records
- Personalized, automated messages
  - Inform students of college-related tasks they may not be aware of
  - Remind students of time-sensitive tasks & deadlines
  - Help students complete matriculation tasks
- Tip: Focus on one enrollment milestone per text and include links to action items. Send 4-5 texts per month

# TEXT-BASED OUTREACH INTERVENTIONS: STUDIES

- *Rhode Island Pipelines to College & Career Research Partnership*
- *Costs: \$5-\$10 per student*
- *Results:*
  - 73% low-income students who received text nudges enrolled in college, compared to 66% that did not receive texts
  - 71% of first-generation students who received text nudges enrolled in colleges, while only 63% of students who did not receive texts enrolled



<https://www.the74million.org/article/nudging-students-to-college-matriculation-how-one-school-network-is-using-text-messages-to-combat-summer-melt-and-ensure-alumni-make-it-to-their-first-day-on-campus/>

# TEXT-BASED OUTREACH INTERVENTIONS: STUDIES

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- Summer PACE: School District-Led Support
- Fort Worth (TX) Independent School District
- *Cost:* \$48/student
- Staffed by district counselors, teachers, other school staff
- Provided financial aid support, social and emotional support, assistance completing paperwork, and other enrollment tasks
- *Results:*
  - Participants 5 percentage points more likely to enroll on-time than previous cohorts

# TEXT-BASED OUTREACH INTERVENTIONS: STUDIES

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- uAspire: Peer-Based Support
- Partnership between uAspire & Mastery Charter Schools in Philadelphia, PA
- Cost: \$90/student
- uAspire intervention implemented simultaneously with texting initiative
- 20 peer mentors advised ~1,000 college intending graduates
- All graduates from same school district, often same school
  - Most junior and senior students attending four-year institutions
- Did not work on tasks that required sharing student/family financial documents
- *Results:*
  - All participants who received peer-support more likely to enroll on-time at four-year institutions
  - Participants who were college-intending, but had not yet chosen an institutions were 9 pp more likely to enroll on-time

# TEXT-BASED OUTREACH INTERVENTIONS: STUDIES

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- Summer College Connect: College Access Program-Led Support
- Partnership between uAspire & Boston Public Schools in MA
- Cost: \$200/student
- Advisors worked with ~400 students – many of whom they'd previously worked with throughout school year
- Phone, text, Facebook outreach
- Provided advising, award letter analysis, offered encouragement and advice, help boost students' confidence
- Results:
  - Participants were 5 pp more likely to seamlessly enroll in college following high school graduation
  - Participants were 8 pp more likely to persist into their second year of college
  - Low-income students saw the largest gains
    - Participants 13 pp more likely to seamlessly enroll and persist into their second year

## GSU POUNCE: INSTITUTION-LED SUPPORT

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Georgia State University in Atlanta, GA

Administration designed a chatbot to guide students through pre-matriculation milestones –

The chatbot sent customized messages that tracked student progress towards enrollment

**Results:**

Summer melt declined 21% compared to previous cohorts

## SUMMARY: BEST PRACTICES

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- Start early, be proactive, be ready, and be flexible
  - “Summer Melt starts in February”
- Establish credibility
  - Alert students to summer outreach plans
  - Use local area code for texting interventions
- Use existing relationships when possible



# SELECTED RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

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- Harvard University – Center for Education Policy Research - Strategic Data Project: [Summer Melt Handbook](#)
- Find the Fit: [Text-based intervention sample messages](#)
- Castleman, B. & Page, L. (2014). Summer Melt: Supporting Low-Income Students Through the Transition to College. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- <https://eab.com/insights/blogs/community-college/worried-about-summer-melt-heres-how-to-fight-it/>
- [“Lessons Learned from a Summer Melt Prevention Program”](#)
- [NCAN eLearning](#)

# FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about the To & Through Advising Challenge and postsecondary match and fit advising, contact:

**Bill DeBaun**, *Director of Data and Evaluation,*  
*National College Access Network*  
[debaunb@collegeaccess.org](mailto:debaunb@collegeaccess.org) / 202-347-4848 x202

**MorraLee Keller**, *Director of Technical Assistance*  
*National College Access Network*  
[kellerm@collegeaccess.org](mailto:kellerm@collegeaccess.org) / 202-347-4848 x213