

How to Support Students between the End of School and the Start of Postsecondary Options

Definition:

- **What:** Supporting students between graduation and the start of postsecondary opportunities means keeping in touch to make sure that students complete all the stages necessary to actually begin college or other postsecondary training, or enter the workforce. It also includes helping students navigate systems they may find challenging, particularly for those who are first-generation college students, immigrants, or others whose families are less well equipped to guide them in this experience.
- **Why:** Nationally, between 10% and 20% of all students who accept admission to four-year colleges fall away in the summer following graduation; this percentage is significantly higher—perhaps as much as 1/3—for poor, minority, and immigrant students whose parents did not attend college. Students face a number of financial and administrative hurdles to navigate during the summer months; without effective family support, these can seem insurmountable. Hurdles include providing transcripts, immunization records, and supplementary FAFSA documentation; navigating student loan offers; and registering for (and attending) orientation. Most students, even those receiving scholarships and other financial aid, will have some unmet gap to make up to cover college costs; even a few hundred dollars can seem prohibitive. A sense of family responsibility may discourage students from pursuing intended plans, particularly if their high school earnings were important to the family budget, or if the family relied on them for childcare or interpretation services. Transportation to campus (for example, for mid-summer orientation) may be an issue. Finally, students who relied heavily on high school staff for moral support and encouragement may find their confidence and motivation waning when they are on their own, or they may expect that “someone” is taking care of financial and administrative matters when this is not the case. Students with alternate plans (e.g., entering the workforce) may similarly find that getting a job that pays a living wage is not as easy as they anticipated; they may need help navigating the world of online applications and interviewing.
- **How:** Ideally, public school districts will collaborate with partners in higher education and employers to address these needs. The following are some possibilities.
 - Many colleges now offer summer bridge programs for admitted first-generation students. Make sure that students are aware of these opportunities and are encouraged to take advantage of them.
 - Use a system of targeted, individualized text messages (such as the “Pounce” system pioneered at Georgia State) that help walk incoming students through the steps needed to reach enrollment.

- Extend some high school counselors' contracts into the summer months for ongoing outreach to assist and encourage graduates in pursuing their postsecondary plans.
- Hire part-time peer mentors (first-generation college sophomores, juniors, or seniors) to encourage and advise incoming freshmen.
- Consider district- or state-level policies to help students close gaps in unmet financial need.

Training Materials:

- **[BOOK] Summer Melt: Supporting Low-Income Students Through the Transition to College**, Harvard Education Press, October 2014. This resource is invaluable; it explores the dimensions of summer melt as well as strategies to address it at different levels.
<http://hepg.org/hep-home/books/summer-melt>

Exemplars in Practice:

- **What it Takes to Thrive: Reflections from a First- Generation College Student**
American Youth Policy Forum, February 2017
<http://www.aypf.org/first-generation-college-students/what-it-takes-to-thrive-reflections-from-a-first-generation-college-student/>
- **First in my Family: Supporting First- Generation College Students**
American Youth Policy Forum, December 2016
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAvitIDqB3w>
- **New Tools to Fight 'Summer Melt': How One University's Texting Campaign Is Keeping Incoming Freshmen on Track**
The 74 Million, July 2017
<http://www.the74million.org/article/new-tools-to-fight-summer-melt-how-one-universitys-texting-campaign-is-keeping-incoming-freshman-on-track/>

Research Foundations:

- **How an Artificially Intelligent Virtual Assistant Helps Students Navigate the Road to College.**
Lindsay C. and Gehlbach, Hunter, October 11, 2017.
Description and evaluation of "Pounce," the text-messaging program used to reduce summer melt at Georgia State.
<https://ssrn.com/abstract=2940297>