



Closing the College Access Gap

Supporting Underrepresented Students on the Path to
Postsecondary Education

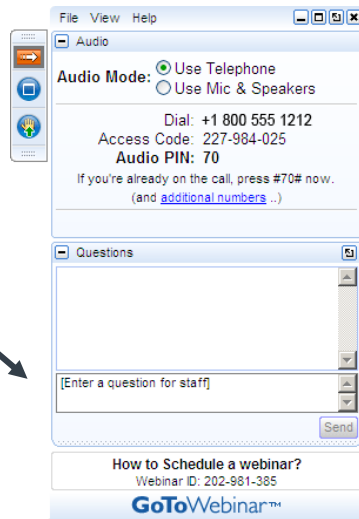
**Removing Non-Academic Barriers to Application
and Matriculation**

District Leadership Forum

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Questions panel



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Closing the College Access Gap

Supporting Underrepresented Students on the Path to Postsecondary Education

1

Create a Culture of High Expectations



1. College Access Accountability Dashboard
2. Parent University
3. Non-Cognitive College Identity Curriculum
4. Shared Experience Video Campaign

2

Build Student Confidence via Advanced Coursework



5. Advanced Course Placement Matrix
6. AP Summer Bridge Program
7. Teacher-Led AP Best Practice Training

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Ensure College Choice Focuses on Likelihood of Success



8. Background-Conscious College Matching Tools
9. Success-Focused College Counseling
10. College Transition Partnerships

4

Remove Barriers to Application and Matriculation



11. Summer College Application Camp
12. Dedicated Financial Aid Support Expert
13. Just-in-Time Summer Text-Message Reminders
14. Transition-Targeted Microscholarships

Underrepresented Students Face an Uphill Battle



Low-Income and Minority Students Lack Support Systems of Wealthier Peers

A Tale of Two College Application Journeys:



Jamal Trotman

- *First Generation College Goer*
- *400:1 Student-Counselor Ratio*
- *Captain, Football Team*
- *Intern: NBC, Blackstone*



Sophie Thompson

- *Parents have Adv. Degrees*
- *40:1 Student-Counselor Ratio*
- *Student Body President*
- *Campaign Volunteer*

• Prepares for SAT By Himself;
Doesn't Use Optimal Test-Taking Practices

• Waits to Focus on College Applications Until After the Football Season

• Focuses on External Scholarships Because "It's Better Than FAFSA"

• Retakes SAT With Dramatic Score Increase; Scores Flagged for Review

• Misses Early January Deadline for Some Colleges

Attending College Uncertain

• Completes SAT Prep Course Junior Year Before Taking SAT

• Begins Applications and FAFSA When First Made Available

• Gets Early Action Applications In By November Deadline

Attending College Almost Guaranteed



Additional Steps Low-Income Students Often Navigate Alone:

- Access and parse a high volume of college option information
- Submit incomplete applications due to unknown missing components (e.g., supplements)
- Complete the FAFSA without parent involvement
- Fill out high volume of paperwork with strict deadlines, yet lack reliable internet access

Sources: Disare, Monica, "Why Is the College-Application Process So Complicated?", The Atlantic, January 15, 2016.; Page, L. and Scott-Clayton, J., "Improving college access in the United States: Barriers and policy responses," Economics of Education Review 51 (2016), 4-22., doi:10.1016/j.econedurev.2016.02.009; EAB interviews and analysis.

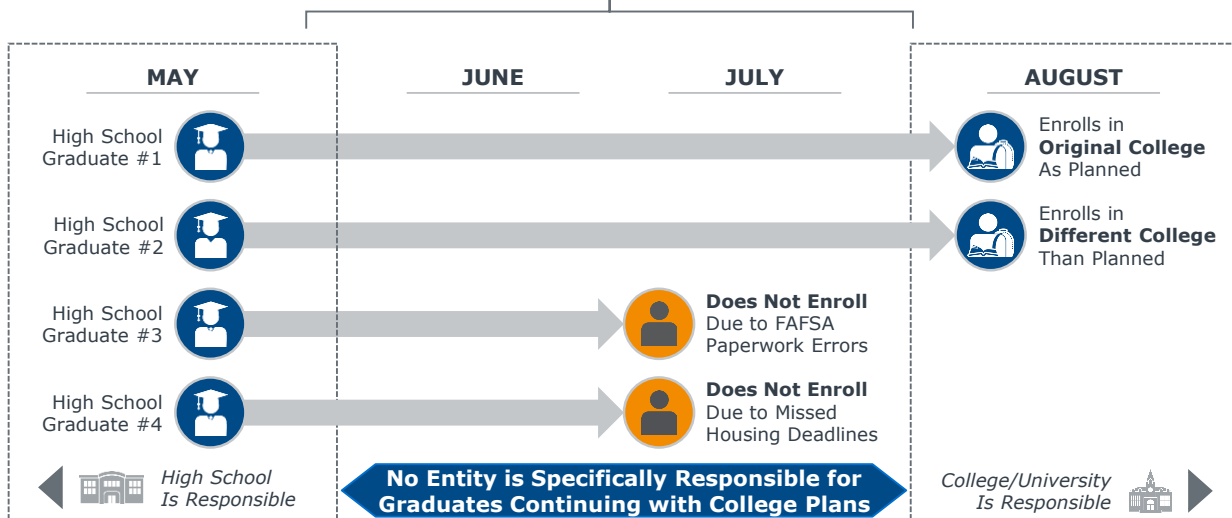
College Admission Is Not the Final Step

One in Three Qualified, Admitted Students Fail to Matriculate

summer melt | *noun*

\ 'sə-mər \ 'melt \

1 : when seemingly college-intending students fail to enroll **at all** in the fall after high school graduation



Potential for Addressing Summer Melt Significant

District Interventions Increase College Enrollment and Persistence



Summer Melt A Large Problem...



10-40%

Of college enrollees 'melt' during the summer (e.g., fail to matriculate after accepting admission)

50%

Low-income students are fifty percent more likely to 'melt' during the summer than the average student

...But So Is the Opportunity to Address It

Summer Melt Interventions and Their Effects on College Enrollment and Student Outcomes



High School Counselors



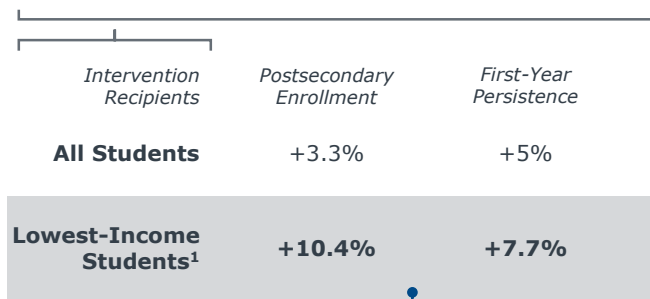
College Access Organizations



Peer Mentors



Text Message Campaign

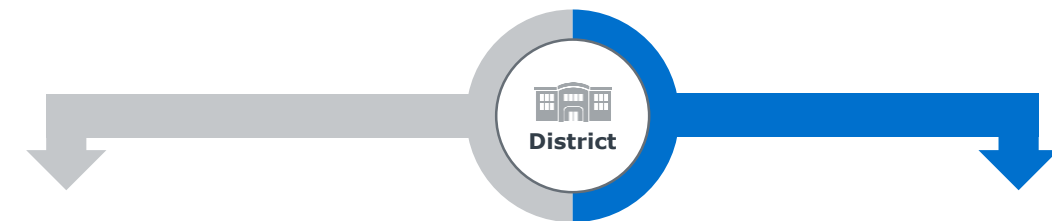


Interventions have greatest effect on lowest income students

Source: Castleman, B. and Page, L., "A Trickle or a Torrent? Understanding the Extent of Summer 'Melt' Among College-Intending High School Graduates" (2014), *Social Science Quarterly* 95, 1 (2014), 202-220. DOI: 10.1111/ssqu.12032; Summer Melt Handbook, Strategic Data Project, Harvard University, <https://sdp.cepr.harvard.edu/summer-melt-handbook>; EAB interviews and analysis.

1) Defined as household incomes that are eligible for federal Pell Grants (i.e., expected family contribution (EFC) is less than \$5,920; typically a household income of \$20,000 or less)

Remove Non-Academic Barriers to Application and Matriculation



Support Parents and Students Through the Application Process

- 11. Summer College Application Camp
- 12. Dedicated Financial Aid Support Expert



Address "Summer Melt"

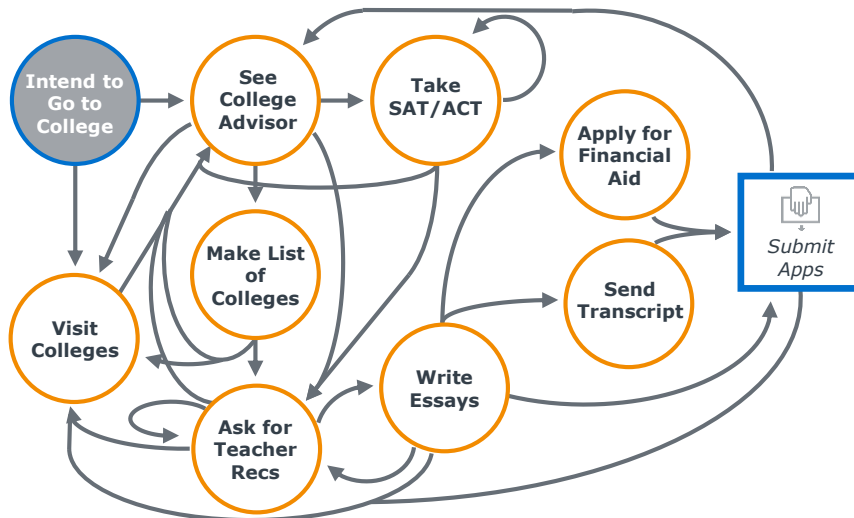
- 13. Just-in-Time Summer Text-Message Reminders
- 14. Transition-Targeted Microscholarships



Journey to College Is Fraught With Barriers

Long, Drawn-out Application Process Hides Many Pitfalls for At-Risk Students

College Applications: A Confusing Process for Anyone



Underrepresented Students Often Challenged in Application Process

30%

Of low-income students **take SAT or ACT exams** (vs. 70% of high income students)

33%

FAFSA non-filers are **Pell Grant eligible** (i.e., low-income)

55%

Of low-income students **file FAFSA after standard deadlines**¹

1) Standard deadlines refer to April or later within the aid year.

School Is NOT Out for Summer

Summer Application Camps Prepare Students When They Have More Time

Profiled Institutions:



Beechwood High School
Fort Mitchell, Kentucky
Midsized Public HS



St. Paul's School
Baltimore, MD
Independent School



Fort Worth ISD¹
Large Urban School District

Summer College Application Camp

An Intensive Workshop That Consolidates Typical Fall Advising



Summer Sessions Tap Unused Student Capacity

Students and their families have more time to address the college application process during the summer than in the fall



Intensive Format Ensures Depth and Consistency

Students learn about all parts of the application process through group workshops and personal advising



Makes College Real for Students

Camps include visits to a college campus or from admissions officers which transform the abstract into the achievable



(Almost) Complete Applications

Students work through the application during the Camp, with most completing the Common Application by the end

1) Fort Worth Independent School District.

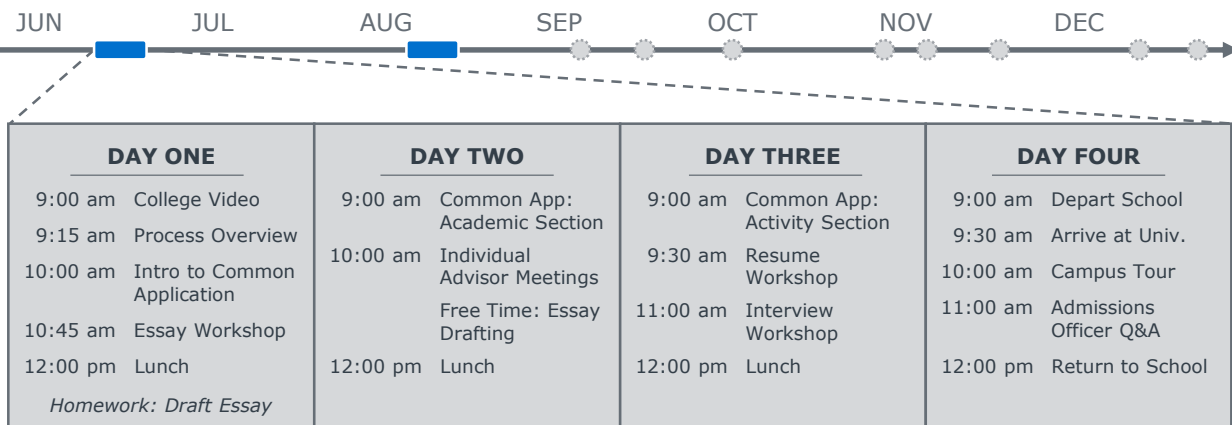
Sessions Help Students Learn and Start Process

Most Difficult Parts of Application Process Covered Before Start of Fall Term

Example Application Camp Schedule¹

Run Camps At Beginning or End of Summer Based on Counselor Availability

Normally Disparate Events Consolidated Into One Intensive Ahead of Busy School Year



Camps Increase Application Completion and Enrollment Likelihood

80% Of Common Application completed by end of camp

25% Higher likelihood of enrolling in college after campus visit

¹) Composite of sample schedules found through EAB interviews. Not every profiled camp offers each of the listed options or follows the same schedule.

Workshops, College Contacts Essential Elements

Longer Camps Allow More Personalized Advising, but More Expensive to Run

Application Camp Program Components

	Group Workshops	One-on-One Advising	College Visit or College Reps Coming to High Schools	Student Cost ¹
Beechwood High School <i>Weeklong Session</i> <i>82 Students</i>	✓	✓	✓	\$100 In District \$250 Out of District
St. Paul's School <i>Weeklong Session</i> <i>98 Students</i>	✓	✓	✓	\$150 Per Student
Fort Worth ISD <i>1.5 Day Session</i> <i>350 Students</i>	✓		✓	Free²

1) Sticker price; student cost is generally subsidized with matching need-based aid across all institutions.

2) Fort Worth ISD partners with local institutions (universities, non-profit organizations) to cover cost.

Camps Popular and Effective

Summer Preparation Facilitates Earlier College Application Submissions

Significant Increase in Application Camp Participation

Beechwood High School



Increase in Application Camp
Participants Since 2013

St. Paul's School



Of Students Attend
Application Camp

Fort Worth ISD



Increase in Participants
Between 2016 and 2017



"We have a strategy: 'Let's get you an acceptance quickly under your belt.'...**The camp helps us change the whole conversation** from 'Am I going to college? Will I get in?' to 'Hey, I'm going to college.' I don't need to apply to 10 colleges now, I need to apply to my favorites."

Jake Talmage, Director of College Counseling, St. Paul's School, MD

Financial Aid Often “Maddeningly Complex”

Overly Complicated FAFSA and Aid Processes and Sources Hinder Students

Federal Aid Process Notoriously Hard to Navigate...

...And Hardest for Those It's Meant to Help



Photo: AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta

Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) unrolls full FAFSA form to illustrate its length and complexity

”

Low-Income Students Most Vulnerable

“Lower-income students suffer disproportionately, and may give up or not bother trying — because of **a lack of support, endurance or knowledge** of the system, or all three...”

Navigating Our Shameful, Maddeningly Complex Student Aid System, The New York Times, 2017

Misunderstanding of College Financing Options Widespread

47%

Of private loan borrowers borrowed less than they could have in Stafford loans

50%

Half of prospective students overestimate loan payments by 50%

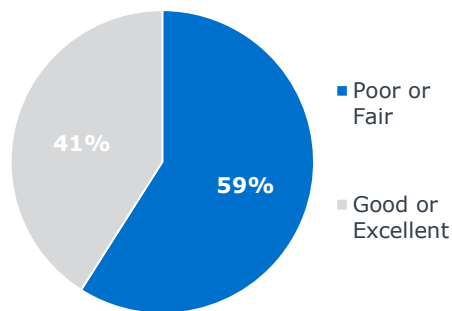
Source: “Mapping Critical Student Decisions Through College,” ideas42, June 2016, <http://www.ideas42.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/ideas42-Final-Report-Mapping-Student-Decisions-PUBLIC-6.2.16-v2final-2-1.pdf>; Ron Lieber, Navigating Our Shameful, Maddeningly Complex Student Aid System, The New York Times, March 17, 2017; EAB interviews and analysis.

Counselors Providing Insufficient Aid Support

School Counselors Lack Time to Be Effective in Advising

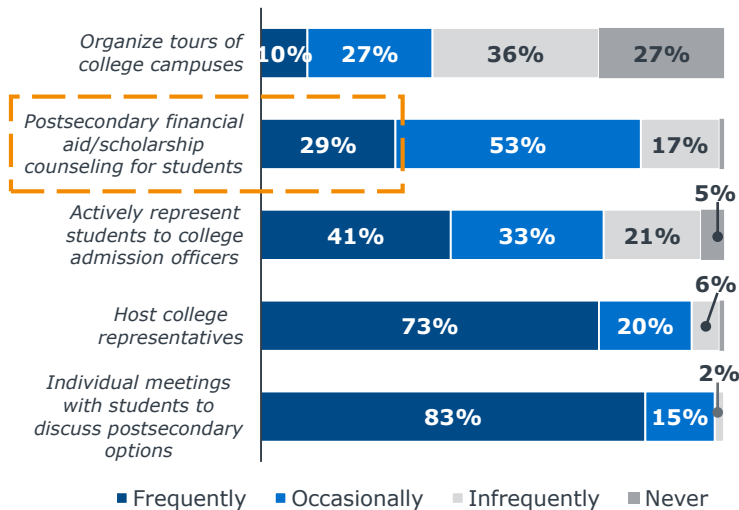
Majority of Students Find Counselor Advice on Financial Aid Inadequate¹

Student Rating of Counselor Ability to Help "Find Ways to Pay for College, Like Financial Aid or Scholarship Programs"



Financial Aid Support Competing for Time with Other Counseling Priorities

Frequency of Counselor Engagement in Activities Related to Postsecondary Admissions Counseling



■ Frequently ■ Occasionally ■ Infrequently ■ Never

1) Survey topic: "How would you rate your high school guidance counselors in the following areas? Would you say they were excellent, good, fair or poor? Q: Helping you find ways to pay for college like financial aid or scholarship programs?"

Providing Counselors with Up-to-Date Information

District FAC¹ Collects Financial Aid Information, Educates Counselors



Understand the College Financial Aid Landscape

Examine All Institutional Aid Options

- Compiles publicly available data on financial aid at 80 most attended schools
- Contacts each school with collected data, asks for verification and additional availability of resources
- Collects financial award letters from students
- Creates database of costs at most attended colleges incorporating DC-specific aid



Develop Financial Aid Resources and Tools

Inform Students, Parents, and Staff at Scale

- Develops interactive curriculum on financial aid process
- Creates an "Award Letter Analyzer" tool to make it easy for students to directly compare financial aid from schools
- Compiles and circulates a scholarship newsletter to counselors, staff, and students



Discover New Financial Opportunities

Expand the Pool of Available Funding

- Find and develop new partnerships with external sources of funding
- Connect counselors and eligible students with funding opportunities

Inform, Update Counselors on Key Financial Aid Questions



How to help students make the best financial choices?



How to interpret specific award offers?



How to maximize total financial aid?

Profiled Institution:

District of Columbia Public Schools, DC



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

1) Financial Aid Coordinator.

Making Counselors' Time Count

Removing Most Resource-Intensive Financial Aid Tasks from Counselor Plate

FAC¹ Supports Counselors on a Number of Time-Consuming Initiatives



Monitor District FAFSA Progress²



Organize Informational Events



Provide Dedicated 1:1 Support

Track Applications and Proactively Flag Errors

Coordinator able to track FAFSA submissions at each high school and identify potential issues with income verification or insufficient information

Use Unique Knowledge to Provide Better Value at District-wide Events

Coordinator facilitates general information events (scholarship & financial aid information sessions, etc.), leveraging their role as the most knowledgeable financial aid person in the district

Take On Most Challenging Cases to Avoid Counselor Bottleneck

Coordinator researches options and dedicates 1:1 time with most difficult financial need cases, such as undocumented students

Financial Aid Support Allows Counselors and Students to Maximize Options



Simplified outreach to schools gives students greater access to financial options



Increases in submitted applications to both colleges and scholarship organizations

1) Financial Aid Coordinator.

2) DCPS participates in the FAFSA Completion Collective Impact Initiative (FCCII), a Colorado-led initiative to adopt a FAFSA completion tracking tool and participate in state-level professional learning community to share best practices. For more information, see **Appendix B, page 13**.

Nudging Students Along the Way to College

Text Message Campaigns Focus on Delivering Timely Milestone Reminders

Text Message Nudging Process



Collect Student Information

- Counselor records
- Flyers with phone number students can text for assistance
- Student surveys



Create Message Templates and Schedule

- Key nudging milestones:
 - Application deadlines
 - Financial aid deadlines
 - Enrollment deposit
 - Housing deposit
 - Health insurance
 - Orientation
 - Placement tests
 - Course registration



Deliver Messages and Provide Support

- One FTE at the Minnesota Office of Higher Education supports 2,000+ students
 - About 10 hours per week spent answering messages

Prominent Text Messaging Vendors



Key Principles to a Successful Messaging Campaign

Short, Relevant Content Appeals to Student Communication Preferences

Tips for Engaging Students With Text Messages



Personalization

Include relevant student information and the counselor/advisor's name, especially in the first message.



Opt-Out

Let students know that they always have the option to text back STOP or CANCEL to stop receiving messages.



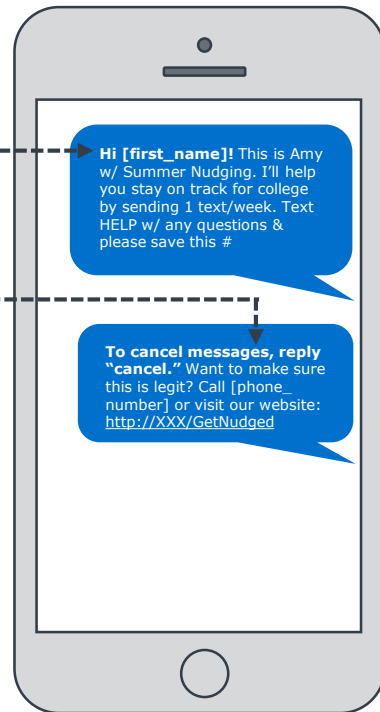
Less is More

Keep messages short—distilling content down to its main point ensures students can digest information quickly.



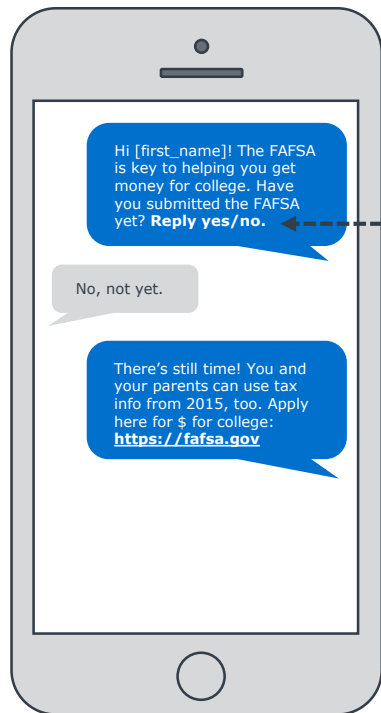
Frequency

The recommended number of prescheduled or programmed messages is 2-5 per month.



Key Principles... (Cont.)

Actionable Messages “Just In Time” Increase Likelihood of Step Completion



Tips for Engaging Students With Text Messages



Call to Action

Include a short link to a resource or have the student respond to a simple yes/no question about their progress.



Urgency

When possible, create urgency by including dates and sending messages about 3 days prior to deadlines.



Interactive

Staff should monitor and reply to messages the hour after a programmed message is sent.



Prepared Responses

Prepare responses to common or anticipated questions in advance to avoid duplicative or inconsistent work.

More Students Complete Critical Process Steps

Text Messages Increase Postsecondary Application and Enrollment

Impact of Text Message Nudging Campaigns on College Access

Houston ISD

12-16%

Increase in completed applications compared to students who did not receive text messages

San Jose USD

22%

Increase in completed financial aid applications for students receiving reminders through their phones

Dallas ISD

4-5%

Increase in likelihood of college enrollment for FRL¹ students receiving text messages

uAspire

7%

Increase in college enrollment for students receiving text messages compared to those who did not

1) Free or reduced price lunch.

Affordability is a Powerful Driver of Attrition

Students Are Most at Risk While Balancing Competing Costs

Students Struggle with the Cost of Attending College

75% Increase in financial attrition from 1994-2014 at a public research university in the West

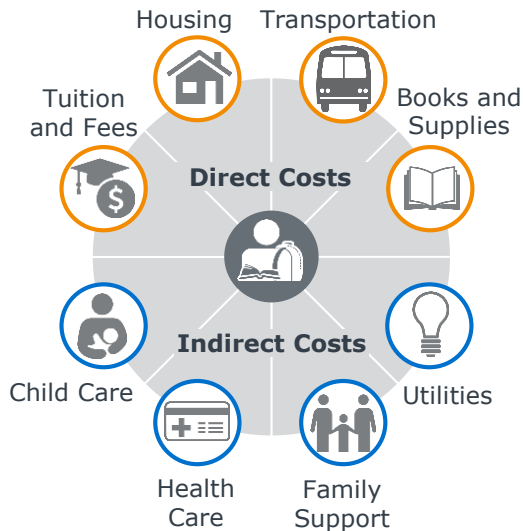
33% Of student responses for withdrawing from college are financial aid-related

Low-Income Students Face Elevated Risk for Missteps

“Our students are financial aid dependent, so **when their financial aid doesn’t process on time it’s just a domino effect.** Modern middle class people don’t run into the same financial issues, they just go pay their bill or get their loan and move on. Our students fall into that category of endless paperwork and verification.”

Administrator, Public High School

A Focus on Tuition Masks the Full Picture of College Cost



Higher Education Leverages Microgrants

Grants Facilitate Persistence for Financially At-Risk Students

Quantitative and Qualitative Criteria Prioritize Student Need and Guide Strategic Impact

▶ Xavier University

- **30%** of students have financial issues
- **20%** of students cannot pay on their own
- **10%** are prioritized for microgrants

Average Grant: \$500

▶ Georgia State University

- **4%** of undergrads dropped out **per term** due to unpaid balances
- Students typically **can pay over 80% of their balance**
- Target academically able, but financially at-risk, students to resolve balance

Average Grant: \$300

Profiled Institutions:

Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA
Xavier University, Cincinnati, OH



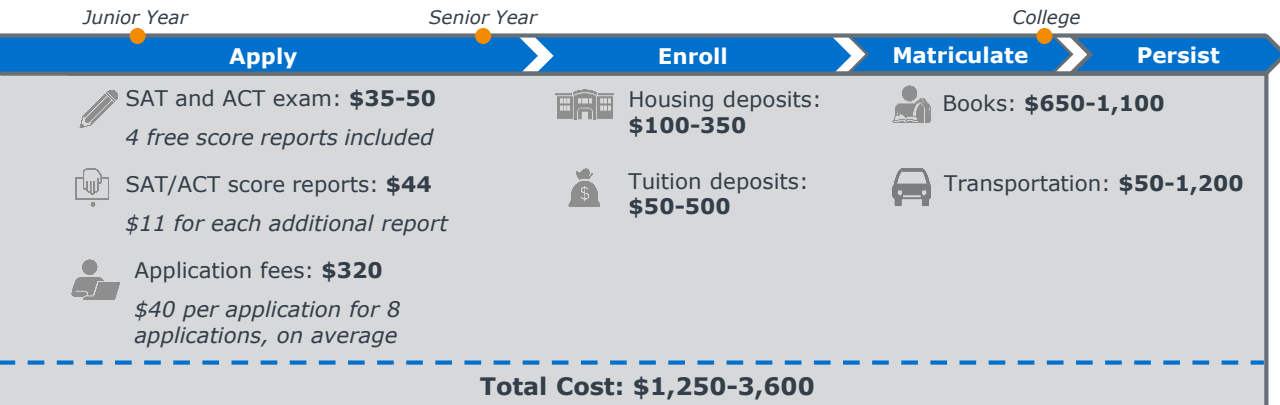
Criteria for Selection

- Student must have unmet need
- FAFSA completed
- Eligible aid exhausted
- On track to graduation (senior status preferred)
- Academic advisor feedback

Hurdles Start Long Before Tuition Payments Begin

Sufficient Cash Flow for Small Financial Gaps Key to Affordability

Students Deterred Before they Arrive on Campus



Even Small Financial Shortfalls Can Derail Plans

“What we found early on was if you’re short \$20,000 or you’re short \$200 for college, it doesn’t matter—if you don’t have any money, it’s all the same. There are some of our kids who have tens of thousands of dollars of scholarship money, **but they’re short just a few hundred dollars and that’s the reason why they don’t go.**”

Administrator, Public High School

Helping Students Overcome Smaller Financial Hurdles

School Provides Targeted Emergency Financial Support

Christel House Academy's Financial Assistance Program



Risk Assessment

College and Career Program Administrator **determines level of need** based on:

- Transportation situation
- Housing situation
- Unmet postsecondary financial need
- Family support available
- Employment
- Number of dependents
- Financial stability



Budgeting

Maximum assistance budgeted by level of student need:

- **High need:** up to \$1,000
- **Medium need:** up to \$750
- **Low need:** up to \$300



Letter of Agreement

- **Financial assistance agreement** signed by graduate and administrator
- To receive funding graduates must:
 - maintain contact and good academic standing
 - be actively working toward meaningful employment



Disbursement

- Students are first connected to alternate sources of assistance when possible
- **Small financial need:** gas or grocery cards offset cost and free funds
- **Large financial need:** payment made directly to appropriate entity

Profiled Institution:

Christel House Academy¹, Indianapolis, IN



1) Pubic charter school.

Small Loans, Big Impact

Access to Financial Support Keeps Students on Track

Impact of the Christel House Academy Financial Assistance Program (2016-17 School Year)

\$14K Used for the financial assistance program

\$280 Average loan disbursed

37% Of active graduates accessed assistance and avoided attrition

Considerations for Success from Higher Education

Selection Method and Targeting Distinguish Grants from Other Emergency Funds at Georgia State University



Collaboration with academic affairs substantiates students' circumstances and ensures awards go to those most in need



Proactive targeting and outreach allow grants to support institutional priorities (e.g., equity for underserved populations), while limiting the chance of students gaming the system

Impact on Georgia State University Grant Recipients

70% Graduate within two semesters

20% Require additional awards

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