

AVOIDING SUMMER MELT

UNDERSTANDING SUMMER MELT AND INTERVENTION STRATEGIES TO AVOID IT

Summer melt occurs when college-intending students who have completed some key college-going steps fail to enroll in higher education in the fall after high school graduation.

WHY DO STUDENTS MELT?

FINANCES

Financing higher education can feel overwhelming. Even those students that successfully submit a financial aid application may face challenges completing the verification process, understanding award letters, determining which aid to accept, and figuring how to pay for the remaining balance. Some students are shocked when they factor in other budget considerations such as transportation, textbooks, and other supplies. For some students, finances stand in the way of starting college.

INFORMATION OVERLOAD

Colleges and universities expect students to access, understand, and respond to a lot of information between the time that they are accepted and the summer after they graduate. During this time, students may also be bombarded by information coming from their high school related to graduation and other senior events. It is likely that students have multiple email addresses or portals that they are expected to check for messages, updates, and tasks. Sometimes, things slip through the crack, and this can lead to summer melt.

INCOMPLETE TASKS

Once accepted to college, students must begin an entirely new to-do list. Often, they must complete additional tasks before enrolling in courses. These tasks may include the following:

- Accept or decline financial aid
- Pay an enrollment deposit
- Register for and attend orientation
- Take or submit placement test scores
- Complete housing forms

Failure to keep up with their school's required tasks may prevent students from enrolling in fall courses.

INTERNET ACCESS

Each school uses its own online portal where, upon admission, students are prompted to login and complete some of the required tasks. These portals can be unfamiliar and difficult to navigate. Additionally, students that have limited access to the internet may struggle to complete tasks and miss time-sensitive information.

LACK OF SUPPORT

Many of the tasks that students are asked to complete before enrolling in college may be unfamiliar and challenging. Once students graduate from high school, they may feel like they have limited or no access to a school counselor or advisor, and they may not be familiar with support resources available to them at their intended college. For first-generation college students this challenge may be amplified. Parents or family members unfamiliar with the college-going process may struggle to provide support.

PERSONAL OUTREACH TO STUDENTS

If staffing and capacity allow, extending individual student support through the summer after senior year can help to address summer melt. School counselors, advisors, and other partners can reach out to students through scheduled office hours, phone calls, emails, or text messages. These communications can offer personalized guidance on topics such as the following:

- Reviewing financial aid and cost of attendance information
- Understanding and completing required paperwork
- Scheduling orientation or placement testing
- Locating low-cost textbooks

DIGITAL OUTREACH TO STUDENTS

Not every school has staffing or capacity to allow school counselors to continue to provide individualized student support through the summer months. By using a digital outreach approach, school counselors and advisors can reach a wide range of students in less time and with fewer resources.

After first conducting an exit survey to gather accurate contact and postsecondary plan information, school counselors and advisors can reach out to students via text or email to send reminders about important tasks, links to helpful planning information, or even school-specific timelines and reminders. It is likely that your district has a system for recording and sending phone calls to enrolled students, and sometimes these systems also have a text option. Depending on your district policy, you may not have access to send outreach this way, but there are other options available to you that don't require you to share your personal cell phone number with the entire senior class. Connect with an administrator in your district to learn if they already use another service for communicating with students and families, such as [Google Voice](#), [Class Dojo](#), [Remind](#), or [Talking Points](#).

COMBINATION PERSONAL AND DIGITAL OUTREACH TO STUDENTS

Consider combining personalized and digital outreach approaches to create a multi-tier system of student support. By creating an exit survey that also functions as a needs assessment, school counselors and advisors can collect accurate contact and postsecondary plan information, while also identifying students that may benefit from more personalized, targeted support. A tiered approach may look something like this:

- **Tier 1:** Texts or emails with general reminders about important summer milestones such as sending final transcripts, scheduling required vaccination appointments, and regularly checking online portals
- **Tier 2:** School-specific texts, emails, or phone call reminders about upcoming deadlines, required paperwork, and orientation schedules
- **Tier 3:** Personalized, digital, or in-person support to complete required tasks, connect with college or community resources, or address other issues as needed