EdResearch for Action

MEASURING SUMMER MELT IN YOUR DISTRICT

This resource draws on the insights and framework of the SDP Summer Melt Handbook by Benjamin L. Castleman, Lindsay C. Page, and Ashley L. Snowdon.

This tool serves as a companion resource to the EdResearch for Action brief, "*Helping Students Make It to College: Evidence-Based Design Principles for Reducing Summer Melt*." While the brief synthesizes what works to reduce melt, this tool helps district and school leaders determine whether melt is a problem locally and which students are most affected. Together, this diagnostic tool and the brief help leaders understand ***who is experiencing summer melt*** and ***what evidence-based strategies can address it.***

What The Tool Does: The tool walks leaders through a three-step process for estimating summer melt, identifying students' intended college enrollment, verifying who actually enrolled, and calculating differences across schools and student subgroups. By pairing step-by-step guidance with example data, a sample senior exit survey, and sample bar charts, it helps districts quickly surface where summer melt is concentrated and where targeted summer outreach may be most needed.

How To Use This Tool: Use Steps 1–3 to calculate your overall melt rate and to examine differences across schools and student groups. If you have student-level data, use the accompanying spreadsheet to automate calculations; if you have only school-level data, follow the guidance and sample visuals on pages 3–4 to conduct a school-based analysis.

To assess the scope of summer melt:

Step 1: Identify which graduating students plan to attend college in the fall after high school graduation.
Step 2: Determine how many of those students actually enroll in college in the fall.
Step 3: Compare the two figures to estimate your district's overall summer melt rate.

Step 1: Identify which graduating students plan to attend college in the fall after high school graduation.

Option 1: Use senior exit surveys
The most effective way to document students' college intentions is through a senior exit survey. Many districts already use these surveys to collect information about students' postsecondary plans, though the specific questions and format can vary widely. Exit surveys can capture essential details, like intended college, deposit status, and contact information, that help schools understand where students plan to go next. A sample senior exit survey is linked here.

Option 2: Survey school counselors
If a student exit survey isn't feasible, consider collecting the information directly from counselors through a short "exit survey for counselors." Ask them to indicate, to the best of their knowledge for each graduating senior, whether the student:

1. has been accepted to college,
2. plans to enroll in college (and if so, where), and
3. has paid a deposit to a specific institution.

Transcript request records can help counselors complete this information.

Step 2: Determine how many of those students actually enroll in college in the fall.

The two options for Step 2 draw on data from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC)- a national nonprofit that provides college enrollment and degree verification data for more than 3,500 colleges and universities, covering over 96% of U.S. students enrolled in higher education. For the most comprehensive analysis of summer melt, we recommend using student-level NSC data (as described in option 1). If accessing individual records isn't feasible, option 2 outlines alternative ways to use aggregate data.

Before moving forward with any NSC-based approach, check whether the colleges that typically enroll the largest share of your graduates participate in the Clearinghouse. You can verify this information at studentclearinghouse.org.

Option 1: Use individual postsecondary enrollment records from the NSC
To use National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) enrollment data, your district must first establish a contract with the NSC. Once in place, you'll share student-level information for your recent graduates, which the NSC will then match to college enrollment records nationwide. The returned data will include details such as the institution attended and enrollment status (full- or part-time). With these records, your district can accurately determine which students enroll in college in the fall after graduation and calculate your overall summer melt rate.

Option 2: Use school-level postsecondary enrollment records from the NSC

If accessing student-level data from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) isn't possible, check whether your district already receives NSC StudentTracker® reports for individual high schools. These reports include the number of graduates from each school who enroll in college the fall after graduation. By comparing these enrollment figures with the number of students who had planned to attend college, you can estimate school-level summer melt rates. While student-level data offer more precision, this approach can still highlight which schools may warrant closer analysis or targeted supports.

Step 3: Compare the two figures to estimate your district's overall summer melt rate.

Once you've gathered data on how many students plan to attend college and how many actually enroll, you can determine the extent of summer melt in your district. To calculate this, you'll need:

- The number of college-intending students (from Step 1)
- The number of students who actually enrolled in college (from Step 2)

How you proceed depends on the type of data available.

Option 1: Use student-level information

If you have student-level information, you can calculate an estimated rate of summer melt using the following formula:

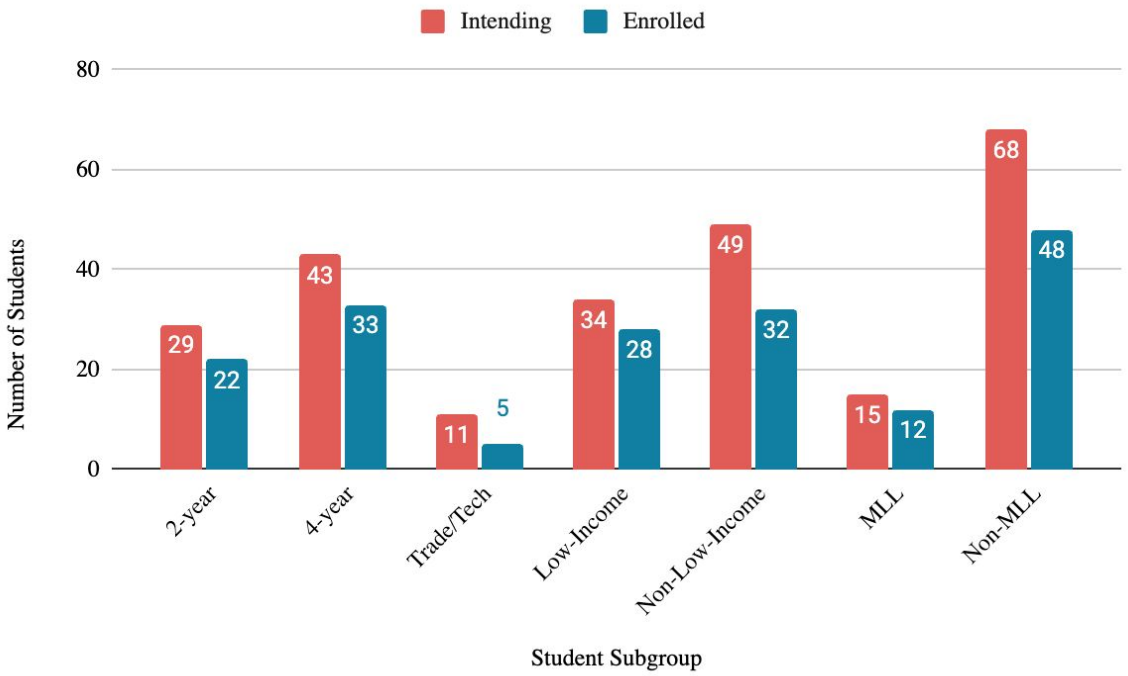
$$\frac{\text{\# students intending to enroll} - \text{\# students who actually enroll}}{\text{\# students intending to enroll}}$$

Linked here is a spreadsheet that provides sample student-level data and built-in melt calculations. It allows district teams to explore how melt calculations work in practice. Leaders can duplicate the sheet, enter their own student data, and immediately generate melt rates by school, student group, or intended college, making it easier to pinpoint where supports should be focused.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1	Student_ID	Student_Name	High_School	Gender	Race_Ethnicity	FRL_Status	MLL	SPED	Cumulative_GPA	Intends_College
2	S0001	Student 001	Roosevelt HS	F	Black	Eligible	No	No	2.13	Yes
3	S0002	Student 002	Hamilton HS	F	Hispanic/Latino	Eligible	No	No	2.99	Yes
4	S0003	Student 003	Roosevelt HS	M	Black	Eligible	No	No	2.65	Yes
5	S0004	Student 004	Hamilton HS	F	Hispanic/Latino	Not eligible	No	Yes	2.7	No
6	S0005	Student 005	Roosevelt HS	Nonbinary	Black	Not eligible	No	Yes	2.35	Yes
7	S0006	Student 006	Roosevelt HS	Nonbinary	Multiracial	Not eligible	No	No	2.33	Yes
8	S0007	Student 007	Hamilton HS	M	Native/Other	Not eligible	No	No	2.73	Yes
9	S0008	Student 008	Hamilton HS	Nonbinary	Asian	Eligible	No	No	2.62	Yes
10	S0009	Student 009	Hamilton HS	F	White	Not eligible	No	No	2.68	Yes
11	S0010	Student 010	Lincoln HS	F	White	Not eligible	No	No	2.43	Yes
12	S0011	Student 011	Roosevelt HS	M	Black	Not eligible	No	No	2.71	Yes
13	S0012	Student 012	Lincoln HS	Nonbinary	Black	Eligible	No	No	2.22	Yes
14	S0013	Student 013	Hamilton HS	Nonbinary	White	Not eligible	No	Yes	1.91	Yes
15	S0014	Student 014	Lincoln HS	Nonbinary	Hispanic/Latino	Eligible	No	No	2.66	No
16	S0015	Student 015	Roosevelt HS	F	Black	Not eligible	Yes	No	1.95	Yes
17	S0016	Student 016	Hamilton HS	F	Black	Eligible	Yes	No	2.55	Yes
18	S0017	Student 017	Lincoln HS	M	Multiracial	Eligible	No	No	2.75	Yes

To the right is a sample bar chart showing intended vs. actual college enrollment across key student subgroups. It highlights where the largest "melt gaps" occur, signaling where targeted interventions could have the greatest impact.

Figure 1: Intended vs. actual college enrollment across key student subgroups



Option 2: Use school-level information

If you only have access to school-level data, focus your analysis on estimating summer melt rates by school. Creating a simple visual, like the example below, can help you compare the number of students who intended to enroll in college with those who actually did across each high school. While student-level data provides greater precision, school-level comparisons can still reveal where supports are most urgently needed.

Figure 2: Intended vs. actual college enrollment by high school

To the right is a sample bar chart comparing expected vs. actual college enrollment by high school.