

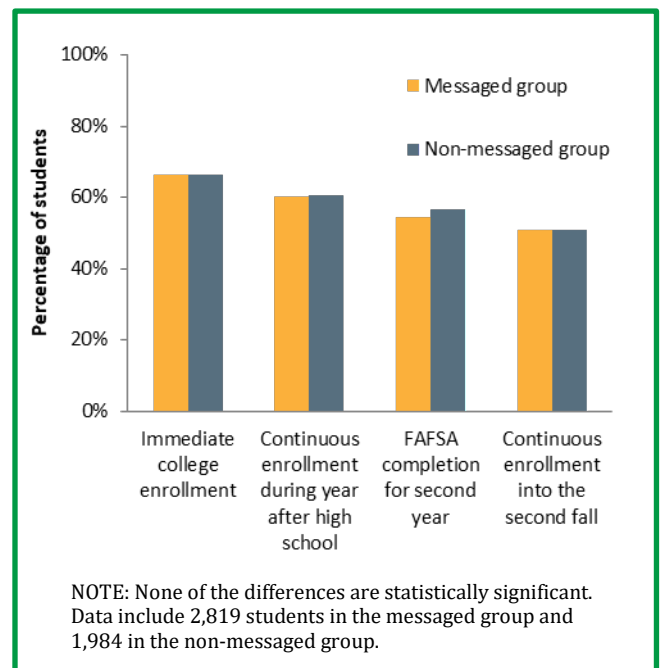
Study of College Transition Messaging in GEAR UP: Impacts on Enrolling and Staying in College

A Publication of the National Center for Education Evaluation at IES

Many high school seniors who plan to attend college do not enroll, and others enroll but do not return for a second year. Low-income students are more likely than their higher-income peers to fall off track after high school ends. Text-message-based advising is a popular strategy to get students timely information and support, including among states and districts that participate in the federal college access program Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP). In this study about 4,800 college-intending seniors in high-need GEAR UP high schools across the country were randomly divided into two groups: one received their regular GEAR UP supports in the summer before and during their first year of college, and the other group received these regular supports along with 37 text messages customized to their college and the option to communicate with an advisor. The study compared the experiences and college enrollment patterns of the two groups of students to determine the effectiveness of the transition messaging.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Students sent text messages were no more likely to enroll or persist in college than were other students.** The messaging did not increase college enrollment in the fall after high school or through the first year and into a second year of college. The messages also did not affect whether students completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
- **Messaging went as planned, but the information students and advisors had may have been among the factors that limited its effectiveness.** Students and their mostly high school-based GEAR UP advisors communicated back and forth via texting. But each advisor supported an average of 40 students dispersed to 8 colleges; providing college-specific information for that caseload may have been challenging. Also, the students might have had more college advising and knowledge in high school than students in other texting studies where transition messaging showed some benefits.



Early studies of low-cost text-message-based advising generated enthusiasm because of their potential to help improve college access. However, accumulating evidence indicates the messaging is only effective in a small set of situations. Researchers continue to adapt technology-based advising as new information emerges about how and in what contexts it seems to work. This study underscores the importance of repeated replications to build an evidence base for an initially promising approach.