September 4, 2019

MEMORANDUM

TO: City and County Superintendents of Education

FROM: Eric G. Mackey
State Superintendent of Education

RE: Summer Melt Project

The Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) is partnering with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to test the impact the Summer Melt Project, an intervention study designed to increase college enrollment and persistence. The Alabama Commission on Higher Education, as well as the Alabama Community College System, are key partners in this initiative. This study, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, will provide new information about whether the intervention is effective in Alabama for rural and first-generation college students.

The ALSDE endorses this study and encourages the high schools in your district to sign on. Very little is required for a high school to participate, and high schools will only need to administer a 15-minute survey to graduating seniors.

What is the intervention? In the late spring and summer after high school graduation, students in the intervention group will receive text messages to remind them to complete important tasks tailored to their chosen college’s enrollment, like completing orientation tasks, placement tests, and housing forms. The text messages often include links that take them directly to the resources or forms they need. The messages also will answer questions that students have about the Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) program or their financial aid award letter. By responding to the text messages, students also will have an opportunity to receive help from staff who can connect them with additional resources as needed. Researchers at AIR will study if the comprehensive text messages and associated support make a difference in encouraging students to complete these important tasks.

What are we asking from you? The AIR would like help in recruiting high schools to administer a 15-minute survey to graduating seniors in early spring 2020. We will obtain informed consent from students who are 18 years old as a part of the survey. For students under 18, we will inform parents of the opportunity for students to participate.
What are the benefits of participating? Prior studies have found positive effects for students who participated in similar text-messaging interventions, including increased college enrollment and persistence. By participating, high schools can help their seniors access needed information and help to encourage their enrollment and attendance in a two- or four-year college in the state of Alabama.

What are the next steps? A representative from the AIR or the ALSDE will be contacting you soon to discuss participation in the Summer Melt Project. In the meantime, if you are willing to participate in this study or would like to learn more, please contact Ms. Kelly Reese at kreese@air.org.

EGM:TG:WEC

cc: Ms. Kelly Reese

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