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## Diving into the Summer Melt Phenomenon

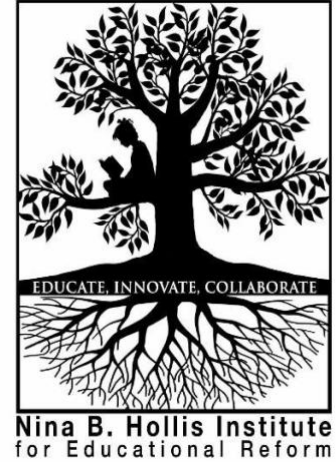
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# Diving into the Summer Melt Phenomenon

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## Abstract

Summer melt is a national phenomenon that occurs when high school graduates who intend to matriculate into higher education following graduation end up not doing so. This phenomenon is widespread across the country and enables the poverty cycle to continue. Over the last decade, national studies conducted to understand the summer melt phenomenon have identified three factors that create barriers to matriculation for high school graduates who succumb to summer melt: financial, paperwork, and home circumstances. The purpose of this phenomenological case study is to describe the experience or transition for a group of low-income graduates of a single school district in Southwest Ohio, all who intended to matriculate into higher education. A sufficient number of matriculated and non-matriculated graduates were recruited to identify factors that contributed to the summer melt phenomenon among a small group of graduates who did not matriculate, and to describe how another small group of matriculated graduates overcame similar factors. Factors identified were compared to factors previously reported by national studies of the summer melt phenomenon. Emergent factors not previously identified were also reported, as well as factors matriculated graduates reported assisted in their successful transition from high school to higher education. Due to the small sample size, results cannot be taken as representative of all graduates of this school district, but may serve as a starting point for conducting future studies on the summer melt phenomenon.

## Keywords

summer melt, matriculation, transition, high school

## Introduction

*Summer melt* is a national phenomenon that occurs when high school graduates intend to matriculate into higher education immediately following graduation but end up not doing so. Various reasons have been identified to explain the summer melt phenomenon, and although it has affected both males and females, all races and cultures, and across all socio-economic households, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds have been the dominant sufferers of summer melt. Many of these youth do not receive transitional support during the summer months to enable them to matriculate into higher education. Three of the most common barriers found are financial aid gaps, deciphering paperwork for pre-matriculation tasks, and other logistics such as transportation (Castleman & Page, 2014). Students from affluent families tend to have parents or other adults with the knowledge and experiences of going to college; non-affluent families “often

lack this college literacy and are therefore more likely to stumble on the pathway to college" (p. 48). Identifying reasons why the summer melt phenomenon occurs and proposing possible solutions for successful matriculation among these students are essential for helping to end the poverty cycle.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The initial purpose of this research study is to identify reasons why recent high school graduates from a single urban school district in Southwest Ohio "melted" – they intended to matriculate right away but did not. Interview responses from this case study will highlight the main obstacles these students face during the summer months as they fail to transition into higher education. Due to limited participation, a secondary focus for this research study was adjusted to identify how other participants overcame barriers to matriculate. Using participants' lived experiences, resources that may assist students in the matriculation process, especially during the summer months when the students are no longer enrolled at the K-12 district but have not officially matriculated into higher education, are highlighted. Comparisons between students who do matriculate and those who do not will be identified using demographics, including socio-economic status. Results from this case study will help determine the extent to which national findings with other schools and districts that have researched the summer melt phenomenon generalize to a specific urban school district in Southwest Ohio in hopes of preventing more students from "melting" during the summer months. As an addendum to this research study, the effects of COVID-19 will be connected to further explore the continuing decline of matriculation among recent high school graduates.

### **Literature Review**

Many graduating seniors leave high school with the intent to attend an institution of higher education in the fall. However, "research has found that as many as one in five high school graduates who have been accepted to and intend to enroll in college fail to matriculate anywhere in the fall semester as a result of unforeseen challenges they encounter during the summer" (Castleman & Page, 2014, p. 2). College-intending students from low-income households experience even higher rates of summer attrition, ranging from 20% to 40% of students not attending college in the fall (Castleman & Page, 2013). Although these graduating seniors worked hard to earn a high school diploma and have dreams of being the first in their families to earn a college degree, they struggle during the transition between high school and college. Financial barriers, paperwork complications, transportation issues, and their value in the home environment are main reasons why students do not actually step foot onto a college campus come fall after their high school graduation (Castleman & Page, 2014).

This literature review delves into the phenomenon of summer melt – when "college-intending high school graduates fail to matriculate anywhere in college in the year following high school" (Castleman & Page, 2015, p. 145). Extensive research on the stated phenomenon reveals many recurrences of research studies conducted by the same authors. Summer melt is a relatively new phenomenon to study, emerging in the early 2000s, which leads to the use of only current research. All research studies chosen for the literature review are based on similar demographic information for this case study, specifically targeting high school transition into higher education and students from low-income families.

Summer melt is a recently-studied phenomenon in the United States that occurs when “seemingly college-bound students find that they have to change or even abandon their postsecondary plans” (Castleman & Page, 2014, p. 2). Because of the complexity of tasks needed to be completed before matriculation into higher education actually occurs, many high school graduates never step foot onto a college campus the following Fall semester when most universities begin their academic term. As many as 20% of students who declare that higher education is on their post-high school path change their minds over the summer months. For students who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, the percentage can be up to 20% higher. “The summer between college acceptance and matriculation is a vulnerable time during which no institution owns high school graduates who have been admitted to college” (Arnold et al., 2009, p. 28). As this section will analyze, the concept of summer melt and how to alleviate the phenomenon is a dominant source of conversation amongst K-12 school districts, higher education institutions, policy makers, and community-based organizations.

A vital source of information on summer melt can be found in Castleman & Page’s book *Summer Melt: Supporting Low-Income Students Through the Transition to College* (2014). This book is divided into three main sections to explain the causes of the phenomenon and provide real-life examples of students affected by summer melt, offer possible solutions to mitigate the summer melt crisis, and contribute guidance for school districts and educational agencies in addressing summer melt. The authors state three main reasons for students to change their post-high school intentions of going to college: financial, paperwork, and home circumstances. “To transition to and succeed in college, students from low-income backgrounds often must quickly assume adult roles and responsibilities” that their more affluent counterparts do not assume because their parents will continue to manage the finances, paperwork, and home circumstances into the college years (p. 47). Complex situations, such as homelessness or being a ward of the state, can further complicate the completion of financial aid or other necessary paperwork, and the lack of college familiarity in lower-income households can disrupt the college-attendance process and advocacy of the students. Therefore, it is imperative that summer supports are in place and easily accessible for all students who have the desire to attend college because “too many students across the country still struggle to make it over the hurdles they encounter in the months following high school graduation” (p. 182).

Castleman & Page (2014) refer to Karen Arnold as the founder of the summer melt phenomenon based on her research project titled Big Picture Longitudinal Study (BPLS), which was finalized March 3, 2015 and submitted for consideration for publication in *Teachers College Record*. This study tracked 6 years of graduates from 23 urban high schools who met various demographics as low-income, non-white, and/or first-generation college attendees (Arnold et al., 2015). These urban high schools were designed to follow the “small school” approach and utilize advisories, individualized interest-based curriculums, extensive internship opportunities, and authentic assessments to propel students with their postsecondary pathways. The “small school” model was created amid widespread calls for education reform and funded by private organizations. Essentially, a large high school is divided into smaller schools for more personal learning. Data was triangulated from various sources using at least five web-based surveys over a period of eight years starting in the spring of the students’ senior years of high school. Both students and advisory leaders at the schools were surveyed to identify if the approach of the Big Picture schools helps

students matriculate into higher education. A measure of success for the students is to earn a college degree. Because these schools "set a college-going expectation and provide so much admissions support and assistance . . . nearly all of the students do begin college, either immediately after high school graduation or after short delays" (p. 34). For students six and seven years after high school - high school classes of 2006 and 2007 - an average of 30% of BPLS students earned a Bachelor's degree and an average of 15% earned an Associate's degree, which is above the national average for high school graduates from low-income households. However, it is important to note that two major limitations of the BPLS are the self-reporting aspect of using surveys to collect data and the variations that may occur between Big Picture schools in regards to support and assistance (i.e. staff, teaching practices, structure).

In another article using results of the BPLS, Arnold and colleagues state "active college counseling the summer after high school graduation leads to substantially higher rates of college enrollment" (Arnold et al., p. 31). Various community organizations and high schools can organize a summer support system for students who plan on attending college in the Fall semester but lack the resources of a knowledgeable professional. These summer supports should include the availability of a guidance counselor to support students with the remaining paperwork that needs to be completed prior to the start of the Fall semester, such as admissions paperwork, financial aid terms and forms, and orientation preparations. Secondly, students of low-income need ongoing support in "finding the best possible pathway for their skills, interests, and postsecondary goals," whether that be entering into a two-year or four-year degree program as well as information on transferring from a two-year to a four-year institution (p. 29). In addition, summer transition programs need social and emotional support for the students and their families to help with unforeseen circumstances and barriers as well as appropriate social engagement at the college or university. Lastly, Arnold et al. notes the importance of family and student financial guidance to assist with documents, contracts, and long-term decisions. All four of these supports are most beneficial if they are "timely, easily understandable, informative, and welcoming" between the transition from high school to college (p. 31).

The summer melt phenomenon has been widely studied and referenced by many other principal investigators and articles. Raquel Rall (2016), from the University of California, Riverside, conducted a qualitative study on low-income students from an urban Los Angeles public high school who failed to matriculate into college right after high school graduation. Rall (2016) applies Schlossberg's transitional theory to alleviate summer melt by "improving interventions during the summer so that ultimately the number of students who successfully transition to college is increased" (p. 467) and hypothesizes that "the difficulty melters face in the summer could be due to the juxtaposition of an anticipated and unanticipated transition" (p. 470). Because the students do not have a support system in place after they leave high school and prior to attending college, lower-income students lack the balance of deficits and resources to fulfill the summer transition.

The first phase of Rall's (2016) research used a high school survey to identify the *melters* - "students who listed postsecondary plans on the survey, yet expressed they were not attending college in the fall" (p. 467). Follow up interviews were conducted on these students in the second phase of research to identify the reasons why they changed or delayed their post-high school plans. The lack of college knowledge in regards to finances, paperwork, and support was the number one reason stated for why the participants melted and did not attend college in the fall.

A more recent research publication explored why there is a decline in the enrollment of adults in higher education (Burns et al., 2022). This mixed-methods research study was conducted from January 2022 to April 2022 and included eleven focus groups and an online survey of 1,675 high school graduates. The findings showed 55% of high school graduates in 2022 have no plans of attending college or are uncertain about attending an institution of higher education. It should be noted that this study was conducted after the COVID-19 pandemic, however, many of the reasonings provided by the participants for not matriculating are similar to previous research findings: financial, mental health, not feeling prepared academically, having a feeling of not fitting in or being supported on a college campus.

The research studies described above all suggest that summer melt is a phenomenon that can be limited by providing a summer support system for high school students as they transition into higher education. These studies focus on college-ready, low-income students and mainly comprise of African Americans as the major participants. Castleman, Owen, & Page (2015) take the research a step further to identify if social identity theory can inhibit male students of color to not matriculate due to not having "a sense of belonging at postsecondary institutions if they perceive colleges and universities to be primarily the domain of affluent, white students" and being "concerned that they would need to downplay their group identity in order to succeed in college" (p. 1). Therefore, the authors posit that collaboration between high schools and universities to offer transitional support will be more beneficial for student matriculation since it will also provide students with a sense of belonging on campus.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Graduating high school and matriculating into higher education can be a milestone accomplishment for economically-disadvantaged students. "Low-income urban youth frequently encounter seemingly overwhelming challenges when endeavoring to transition from high school to college" (Rall, 2016, p. 462). These students have several postsecondary pathways they can pursue, but many of them indicate their intention is to attend an institute of higher education. However, the transition in doing so can be overwhelming, confusing, and downright belittling. Thus, examining the phenomenon of summer melt and how it impacts students in a specific urban school district in Southwest Ohio is the foundation for this research study.

Because students from low-income families may not be surrounded by people who have matriculated into higher education successfully, these students may doubt their sense of belonging on a college campus, may fear they will have a hard time connecting with other students, or may dread the idea of leaving home or their neighborhood (Castleman & Page, 2014). It is possible that they do not imagine themselves as a college student. Therefore, "the pressures to not enroll are internal rather than external from family or friends" (p. 66). According to Chickering and Schlossberg (2002), "entering college involves letting go of the way you were and creating a new identity" (p. 5). Summer melt can occur to these students if they do not feel connected to the college lifestyle.

In addition to not feeling connected to a higher education institution, students spend the summer months after high school graduation transitioning into adulthood. "To transition to and succeed in college, students from low-income backgrounds often must quickly assume adult roles and

responsibilities" because they have fewer resources than more affluent peers to assist them in self-sufficiency skills (Castleman & Page, 2014, p. 47). Because students from low-income families often have atypical circumstances than a traditional college student and may lack the familiarity of college life, the summer melt phenomenon exists.

## **Methodology**

This research study focused on one specific school district's experience with the summer melt phenomenon utilizing a phenomenological case study research method. In-depth interviews were designed to elicit insight into why some of the graduates from this urban school district "melted" during the summer months and did not matriculate into higher education, as well as explain why other students from the same district facing the same barriers did matriculate. According to Saldana (2014), cases may be chosen deliberately, strategically, or for convenience. Using this particular K-12 urban school district for this phenomenological case study was all three: deliberate because the study focused solely on participants who were recent high school graduates of the district; strategic in that the demographics of the school district represented a typical urban school district in the United States; and convenient because the primary principal investigator is an alumni and a current employee of the school district.

Using network sampling, the principal investigator sought after known representatives of the summer melt phenomenon as well as matriculated representatives using recommendations from professionals in each of the district's 16 high schools. The ideal number of participants would have been 32 – two from each high school to represent one summer melt and one matriculation. After the originally proposed interview method fell short of this goal, an online survey was created in an attempt to solicit additional responses. This secondary form of data collection was used to primarily target non-matriculated 2018 and 2019 high school graduates from the same school district. The principal investigator acquired additional email addresses in an effort to increase the number of participants because "participant recruitment is vital to the success of a research study" (Newington & Metcalfe, 2014, p.1). The final number of participants did not meet the ideal number of participants and fell short of the stated target required for conducting a phenomenological case study of the entire school district. Additionally, because the online survey did not track which high school participants had graduated from, the distribution of participants across the district is unknown. Thus, while data analysis suggests a degree of saturation was reaching with respect to both the summer melt and matriculated participant conditions, the representativeness of the data within the district as a whole cannot be determined. Due to receiving a low number of potential participants, an online survey was created four months into the study in lieu of the in-person interview to attain more participants.

A total of ten former high school students were interviewed or completed the online survey. Participants encountered criterion-based sampling to ensure each participant was a 2018 or 2019 high school graduate of the school district and fell into one of two cohorts: either the graduate intended to matriculate into higher education but did not or the graduate matriculated into higher education. Although the original focus of the research study was to identify factors that led to summer melt in this school district, most of the participants matriculated. The focus of the study then transformed into identifying how the matriculated participants overcame barriers that students from similar backgrounds may not overcome. Limitations encountered with recruiting participants

for the study dictated the original design be reframed as a phenomenological case study, focusing instead on the lived experience of a smaller group of matriculated and non-matriculated graduates of the target school district.

Initial contact information for soliciting graduates to participate in this research study was requested through an email message sent to professional contacts of the principal investigator within the target school district. This recruitment strategy yielded a much lower number of potential participants than needed for the study and did not reflect graduates from all district high schools. Solicitation emails were sent to these potential participants from the co-investigators. Only participants who were 18 years old or older were selected.

Narrative interviews with participants was the primary form of data collection. The purpose of each interview was to identify one of the following: 1.) factors that inhibited the participant toward matriculation into a higher education program following high school graduation or 2.) factors that assisted the participant toward matriculation. Confidentiality was maintained by randomly assigning each participant a number during data analysis to de-identify the participants. In addition, no information was transcribed in a manner that could be traced back to the individual participants.

Interviews were conducted using the narrative interview approach (Muylaert et al., 2014). "The narration is a resource that aims to investigate the privacy of the interviewees and enables, in result, contribution to new knowledge that can lead to a closer view" of the phenomenon being studied (p. 185). Each face-to-face interview was transcribed by the primary principal investigator using an online service. Content analysis of the transcribed interviews was done in a three-column manner: transcription in column one, reduction of text in column two, and key words in column three. Key words included previous research results as well as new findings that explain the summer melt phenomenon as it exists for this urban school district in Southwestern Ohio. After all interviews were transcribed and analyzed, the principal investigator "establish(ed) similarities among individual cases thus allowing the identification of collective trajectories" (p. 187) that surfaced in this case study and coincide with previous research on the summer melt phenomenon.

Because the number of participants was low and unbalanced between non-matriculated and matriculated, an online survey was created and distributed to potential participants through network sampling to elicit more participants. This secondary form of data collection was used to primarily target non-matriculated 2018 or 2019 high school graduates from the same school district. The use of survey methods yielded enough additional responses to balance the number of matriculated and non-matriculated participants. Content analysis of the online surveys was completed in a similar fashion to the interviews using a three-column manner, followed by theoretical and open coding.

All pieces of the data collection were maintained by the principal investigator in a secure location. The credibility of the data reported was verified through member checking and external peer review as well as the use of rich, thick-text description for direct quotes from the participants (Creswell, 1998). Participants were emailed copies of their transcribed interview to review for accuracy and to contribute feedback, clarification, or further suggestions so they could "add credibility to the qualitative study by having a chance to react to both the data and the final narrative (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). An external peer review was carried out by three



professionals who are familiar with the summer melt phenomenon but are not associated with the study. Network sampling was used to elicit the peer reviewers in regards to raw data, transcripts, coding schemes, and comparative results.

## Limitations

Several limitations existed throughout the case study research. First, only a small percentage of the 2018 graduates of the school district were interviewed. Although these students represented the criterion for participating, their interview responses were limited to their individual perspectives on how they experienced the transition after high school graduation. It is noted that since this study collected data through interviews, it relied exclusively on self-reported data. To fully represent the district, one participant per cohort from each of the 16 high schools should be involved in the data collection. While efforts were taken to achieve this distribution of participants, these participating 2018 high school graduates cannot be assumed to represent all students at their respective high schools.

Another limitation to the case study was the interpretative nature of the principal investigator when transcribing and analyzing the interviews. Since the principal investigator was the primary instrument in data collection of case studies, the meaning of the data was solely interpreted by a single person. A third limitation existed by using the *2017 Ohio Remediation Report* because it limits matriculation data to high school graduates who only attend public, in-state institutions of higher education, not private or out-of-state. Lastly, other results could be produced from other means of data collection, such as participant observation and program evaluation.

## Results

Participants in this research study, who are identified as underrepresented, specify factors that inhibited them from matriculating or assisted them in doing so. Some of these factors are prevalent in previous research studies - financial, paperwork, and home circumstances – and others have newly emerged from this study - lives on campus, has a declared major, is socially engaged on campus, and has mental health concerns.

Of the two non-matriculated participants in this case study who succumbed to the summer melt phenomenon, only one sat for an interview; the other responded to the online survey. Content analysis of both responses identified two of the three factors previously related to summer melt published research literature that served as the basis for theoretical coding in this study. Both participants cited deficiencies in understanding documents and paperwork needed for matriculation and the lack of "college knowledge" in their household (Arnold et al. 2009), and neither had any professional relationships with persons or organizations affiliated with higher education to assist with the college-going process (Duncheon & Relles, 2019). In addition, one student recalled her high school counseling services to be inadequate (Pham & Keenan, 2011) and also lacked resources of transportation and electronic devices. The other non-matriculated participant was concerned about leaving her family and is now looking into attending a local community college rather than attending a four-year university in another city. Neither participant mentioned tuition costs or financial aid to be a hindrance in the matriculation process.

Two of the ten graduates of this urban school district in Southwest Ohio who participated in this study succumbed to the summer melt phenomenon. After examining the data from these two participants, lacking transitional support during the summer months after high school graduation was a major obstacle to overcome in order to matriculate into higher education. This finding is consistent with previous studies which have reported that along with college-ready skills and curricular standards, "students also need support systems to navigate the college-going process" (Duncheon & Relles, 2019, p. 147). If upon further investigation, the experiences reported by these two participants is found to be representative of other graduates of the target school district, local administrators in both the district high schools and institutions of higher education may want to consider implementing more systems to support these students' transition from high school into postsecondary education. However, the results of this study alone are not sufficient to warrant such a recommendation.

## Conclusions

After analyzing the narrative transcripts and comparing the outcomes to past research studies, there is some evidence to suggest that transitional support for high school graduates into higher education plays an important role in the transitional pathway for graduates of the target school district which serves a large number of underrepresented students. As previous researchers have concluded, "For many low-income students, the transition to college requires that they take on primary responsibility for complex processes like income verification and loan applications that are challenging even for college-educated adults" (Castleman & Page, 2014, p. 46). Not only do these adult responsibilities lead to mental health concerns, such as anxiety and stress which the majority of the participants in this study experienced, being thrown into such adult responsibilities is overwhelming to the students and triggers them to succumb to the summer melt phenomenon. Having professional support systems in place for graduates to easily contact can help simplify the transitional process and thus increase the matriculation rate for high school graduates.

A new factor that emerged among non-matriculated and matriculated participants is mental health concerns. Six of the ten participants cited mental health concerns, including one non-matriculated participant, during the time of transitioning from high school into higher education. Various types of mental health concerns were documented. Several of the participants experienced anxiety throughout the transition process. One participant noted "a lack of support with mental health, at least throughout (her) high school experience" but does acknowledge that mental health care is covered in the institution's tuition. None of these participants expounded on any mental health services they received or are currently receiving.

While results of this study are insufficient to determine whether taking on adult responsibilities plays a causal role in precipitating mental health concerns, such as anxiety and stress, it is notable that the majority of the participants in this study reported experiencing a variety of issues with mental health. Significantly, in this study, mental health concerns were reported by both matriculated and non-matriculated graduates, so there is no basis for concluding this factor posed an insurmountable obstacle to transitioning to postsecondary education among graduates of the target school district. There is some evidence to suggest graduates of these high schools who did matriculate were able to access community support services available to them for dealing with the mental health issues that might have otherwise prevented them from matriculating. Having

professional support systems in place for these graduates to easily contact may have simplified the transitional process and thus increase the matriculation rate for graduates from this school district.

Professional support systems can come in a variety of ways. Starting with the high schools, counselors and affiliated college support networks can continually reach out to graduates who have the intent to matriculate over the summer months. Matriculated participants from this research study noted the significance of such resources as well as the availability and ease in contacting them. The two participants who succumbed to summer melt did not know who to contact, when to contact, or how to contact someone to assist in the transition process. Therefore, having the high school resources initialize contact with the graduates would alleviate such unknown notions. As Castleman et al. (2015) claim, "proactive outreach during the summer months leads to substantially higher rates of on-time college enrollment."

Previous research indicates such summer college counseling does not need to be face-to-face to impact student matriculation into higher education. Research by Castleman & Page (2015) indicates the use of automated text messaging can remind students and parents of required tasks for matriculation. Text messaging is an inexpensive way to reach hundreds of contacts at once and can be utilized individually as needed. Similarly, creating a peer mentorship program or assigning college-graduate mentors to first-generation college students could also be another easy and inexpensive way to tackle summer melt. Both text messages and mentorships can be implemented by high schools and institutions of higher education. In fact, collaboration between high schools and universities can be beneficial for student matriculation since it would provide students with familiarity as well as belonging on the new campus (Castleman et al., 2015). There was insufficient evidence from this study to determine the nature of support services utilized by graduates of the local school district in this study.

Finally, most of the matriculated participants in this research study utilized local grant money in doing so, and neither of the two non-matriculated participants identified financial concerns as a factor in their not matriculating. This finding suggests financial support is readily available to graduates of the local school district, for all who know how to take advantage of this resource. Follow-up may be warranted to determine whether sufficient effort is being made to communicate this resource to all graduates as early as possible in their high school years. Implementing a high school elective course geared to higher education matriculation can prepare students and their families for the transition process and provide resources that students can reference after high school graduation.

### **Implications for Future Studies**

The goal of this research was to gain a better understanding of the transition between high school graduation and matriculation into higher education for low-income graduates of a specific school district in Southwest Ohio. Although many graduating seniors in this district work hard to earn a high school diploma and have dreams of being the first in their families to earn a college degree, they struggle during the transition between high school and college. This phenomenon, labeled summer melt, is a dominant source of conversation in this region of the country among K-12 school districts, higher education institutions, policy makers, and community-based organizations.

This case study identified factors that contribute to the summer melt phenomenon for graduates of one urban school district in Southwestern Ohio. Such information can help educators in this district develop strategies aimed at reducing the high percentages of summer melt, especially since the pandemic of 2020. According to CollegeBoard (2021), “immediate college enrollment rates declined among recent high school graduates between the 2019 and 2020 cohorts” overall by five percentage points (p. 9). With the lingering social effects of COVID-19 still being prominent, the need for such transitional support is imperative in order to increase higher education enrollment among young adults.

Analysis of participant interviews revealed reasons why the recent high school graduates who intended to matriculate did not as well as causes for others to matriculate. Because very little, if any, data concerning matriculation was available during the summer months prior to this research study, new data emerged that may bridge the gap between what is celebrated in May as a high projected matriculation rate and what the matriculation rate actually is after a college quarter or semester.

### **Future Research**

Due to the small number of participants and underrepresentation of non-matriculated college-bound high school graduates recruited to this study, the results reported here cannot be interpreted as representative of the target school district. Moreover, the failure to recruit a larger number of non-matriculated graduates cannot be interpreted as indicating students in this school district are not experiencing summer melt. Further research in this area is needed to overcome the multiple shortcomings of this study, including: 1) more reliable recruitment strategies for penetrating the population of students in this district who succumb to the summer melt phenomenon; 2) alternative methods of assessing factors contributing to summer melt; 3) inclusion of evidence from sources beyond the high school graduates themselves; 4) factorial designs aimed at determining what combinations of factors are predictive of succumbing to summer melt versus overcoming the phenomenon; and 5) what ameliorating conditions protect high school graduates from succumbing to summer melt.

As was many of the literature review articles, it would be beneficial if future research on summer melt phenomenon in this school district was longitudinal to include a larger sample pool using the same participants from high school through freshman year of college. This span would allow the principal investigators to make comparisons among the participants during the college admission process, transition into higher education process, and post-matriculation process.

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