

# SUMMER MELT

## THE RESEARCH LANDSCAPE

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# Revisiting the concept of summer melt

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*Summer melt* is a term traditionally used by college admissions officers to describe the phenomenon that students pay a deposit to attend a particular college but do not matriculate *at that college* the following fall.

Here, *summer melt* describes the phenomenon that college-intending students fail to enroll in college *at all* in the fall following high school graduation.

# The summer melt problem

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- Even after being admitted to and selecting a particular college, college-intending students have to complete a range of complex tasks during the summer:
  - **Financial:** award letter review, master promissory note signature, tuition bill payment
  - **Procedural:** orientation and placement test registration; housing forms, health insurance applications or waivers
  - **Logistical:** making arrangements to travel to campus for the start of the school year

# Summer challenges for students in Austin

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## **FINANCIAL**

- Misconceptions of cost & money
- Financial aid verification
- Properly filing FAFSA / TAFSA
- Paying 1<sup>st</sup> tuition bill out of pocket
- Lack of funds for small fees (e.g., housing deposit)

## **LOGISTICAL**

- No transportation to campus for orientation / start of year
- Not being able to take off time from work

## **PROCEDURAL**

- Trouble getting transcripts
- Lack of resources / information
- Meningitis shot
- Lack of access to internet
- Immigration status

## **SOCIAL / EMOTIONAL**

- Little family support
- Fear of the unknown
- Scared to move away from family
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Not knowing the questions to ask

# The summer melt problem

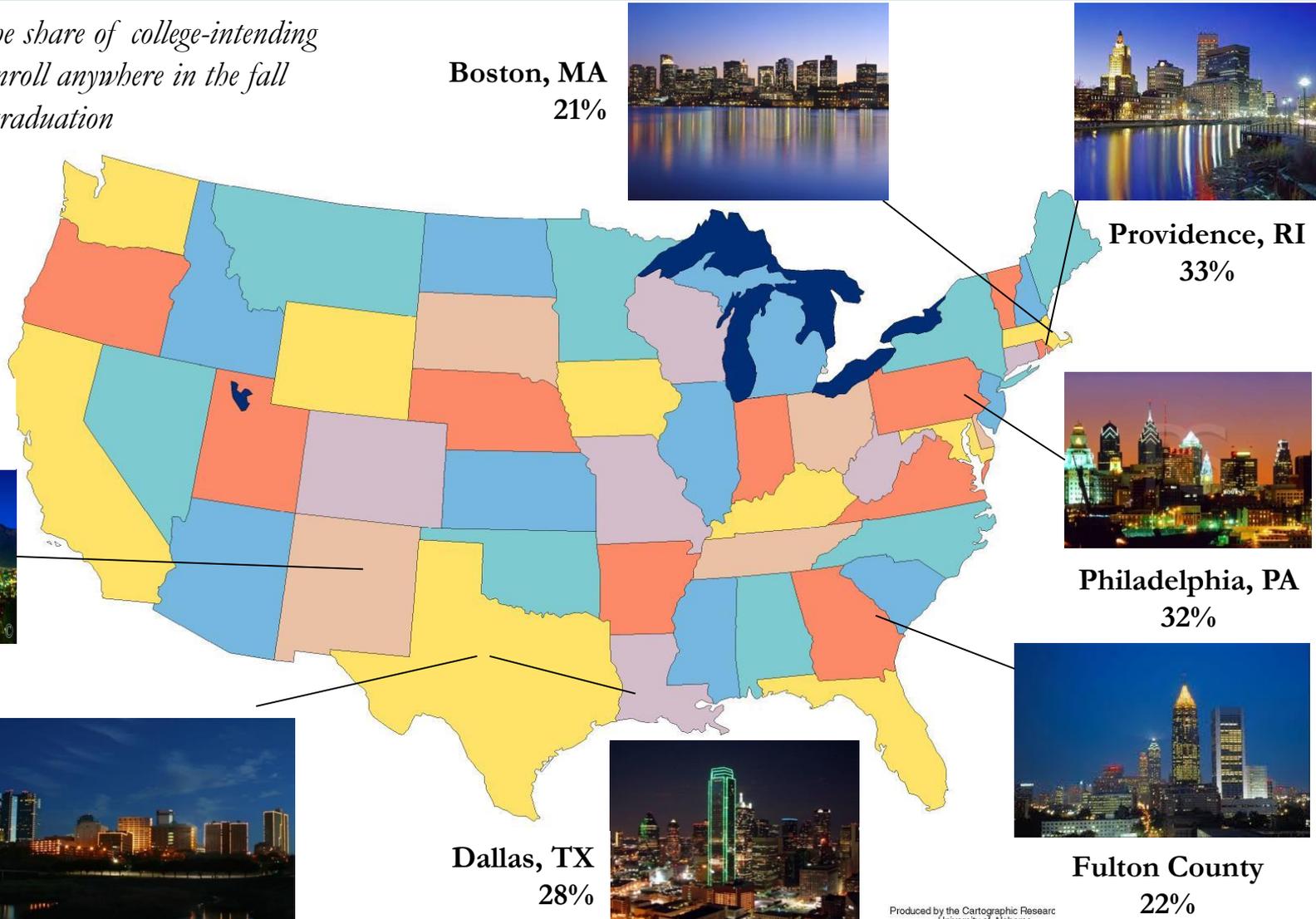
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- During the summer, students often lack access to assistance to complete these tasks
  - ▣ HS counselors typically do not work during the summer
  - ▣ Students have yet to engage with supports at their intended college
- Faced with complex tasks and lacking help, college-intending HS graduates may change or even abandon their college plans

# The magnitude of the summer melt problem

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*Percentages indicate the share of college-intending students that do not enroll anywhere in the fall following high school graduation*



**Boston, MA**  
21%



**Providence, RI**  
33%

**Albuquerque, NM**  
29%



**Philadelphia, PA**  
32%



**Fort Worth, TX**  
44%

**Dallas, TX**  
28%



**Fulton County**  
22%

# The potential for summer college-going support

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- Students have signaled a strong intention to enroll
- Summer barriers may be simpler to address than other problems
- Students may be more responsive to outreach and support in the summer months
- Ample supply of caring adults (including counselors, other school staff, college students and other adult mentors) to staff outreach efforts

# Experimental interventions to reduce summer melt

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## **Counselor Outreach:**

Counselors reached out to students to offer help with financial aid, required paperwork, and social-emotional issues

## **Peer mentor outreach:**

Peer mentors in college offered advice and help navigating summer challenges

## **Text messages:**

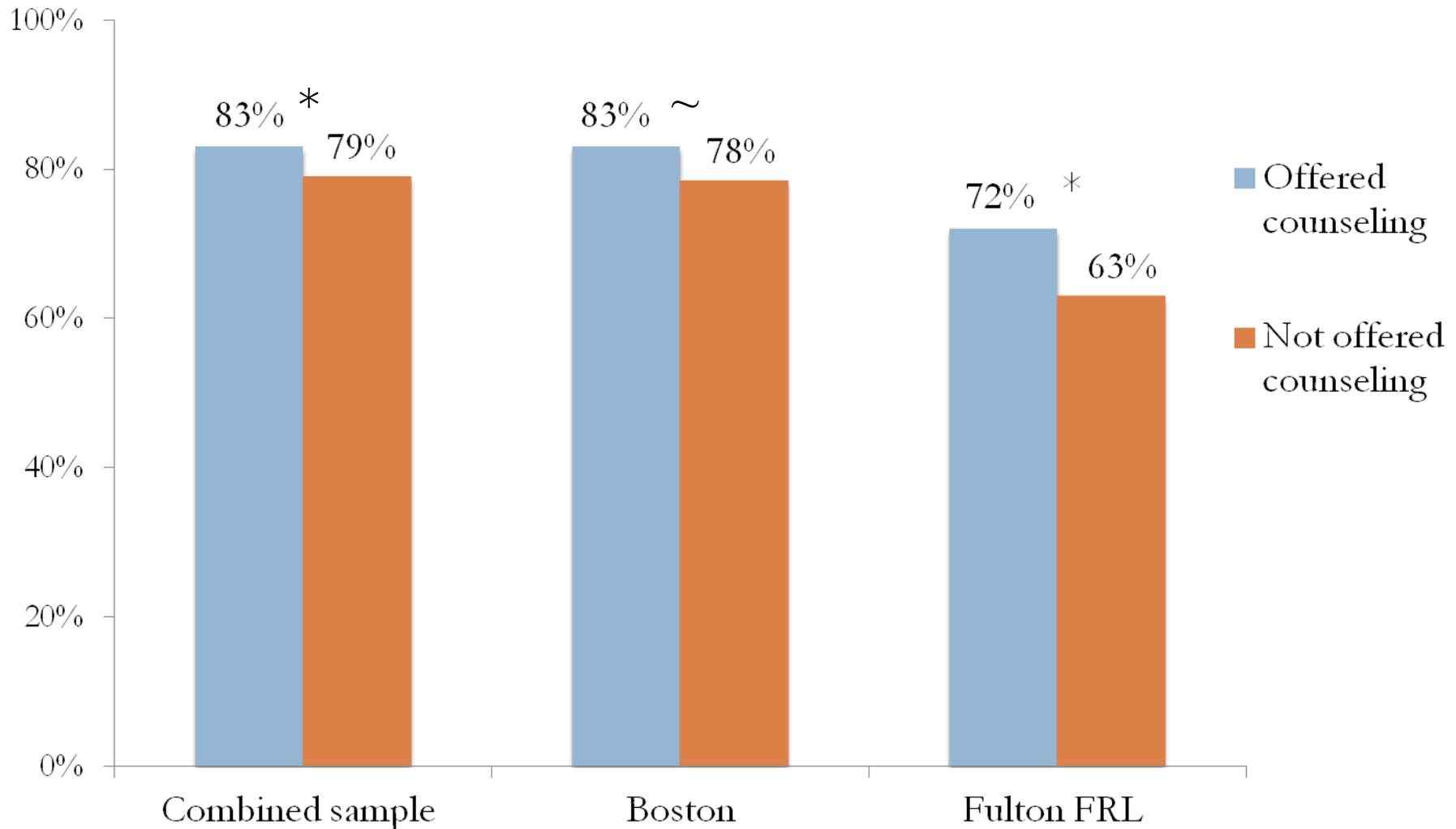
Personalized texts reminding students of tasks to complete at their intended college

Eight urban districts around the country

Approximately 15,000 students participating in experiments across interventions and sites

# Counselor outreach: Impact on freshman year fall enrollment

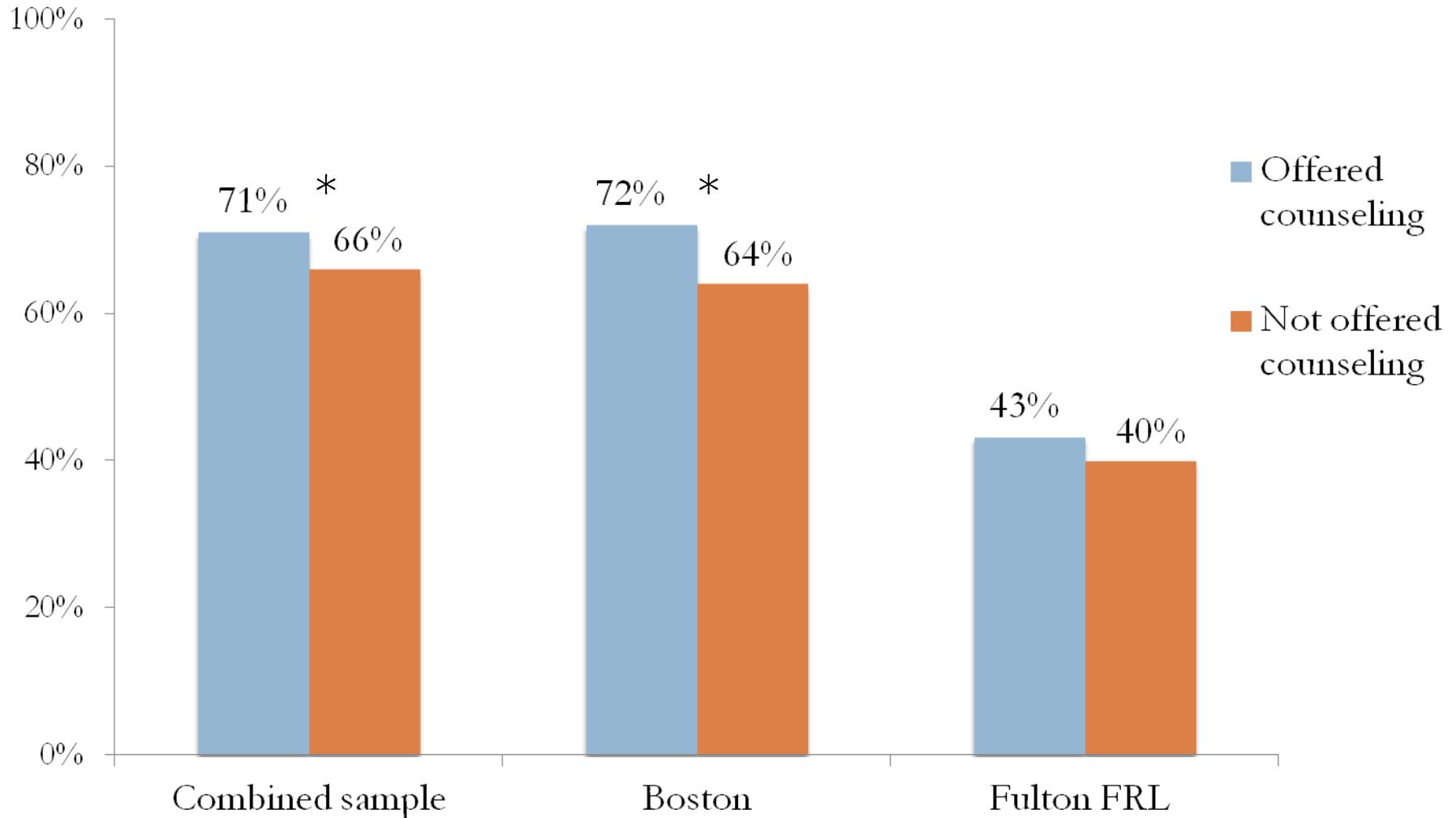
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# Counselor outreach: Impact on sophomore year persistence

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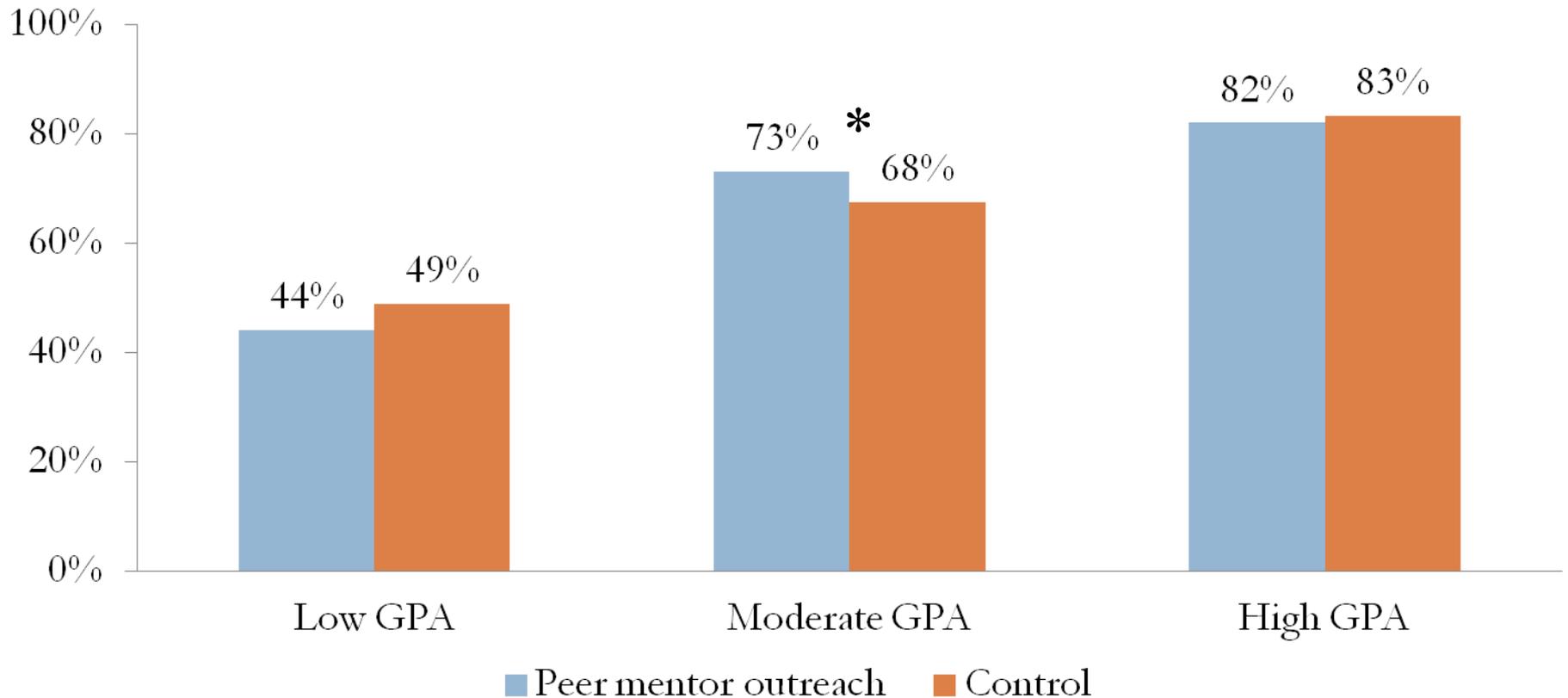


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# Impact of peer mentor intervention, by GPA

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## Fall college enrollment

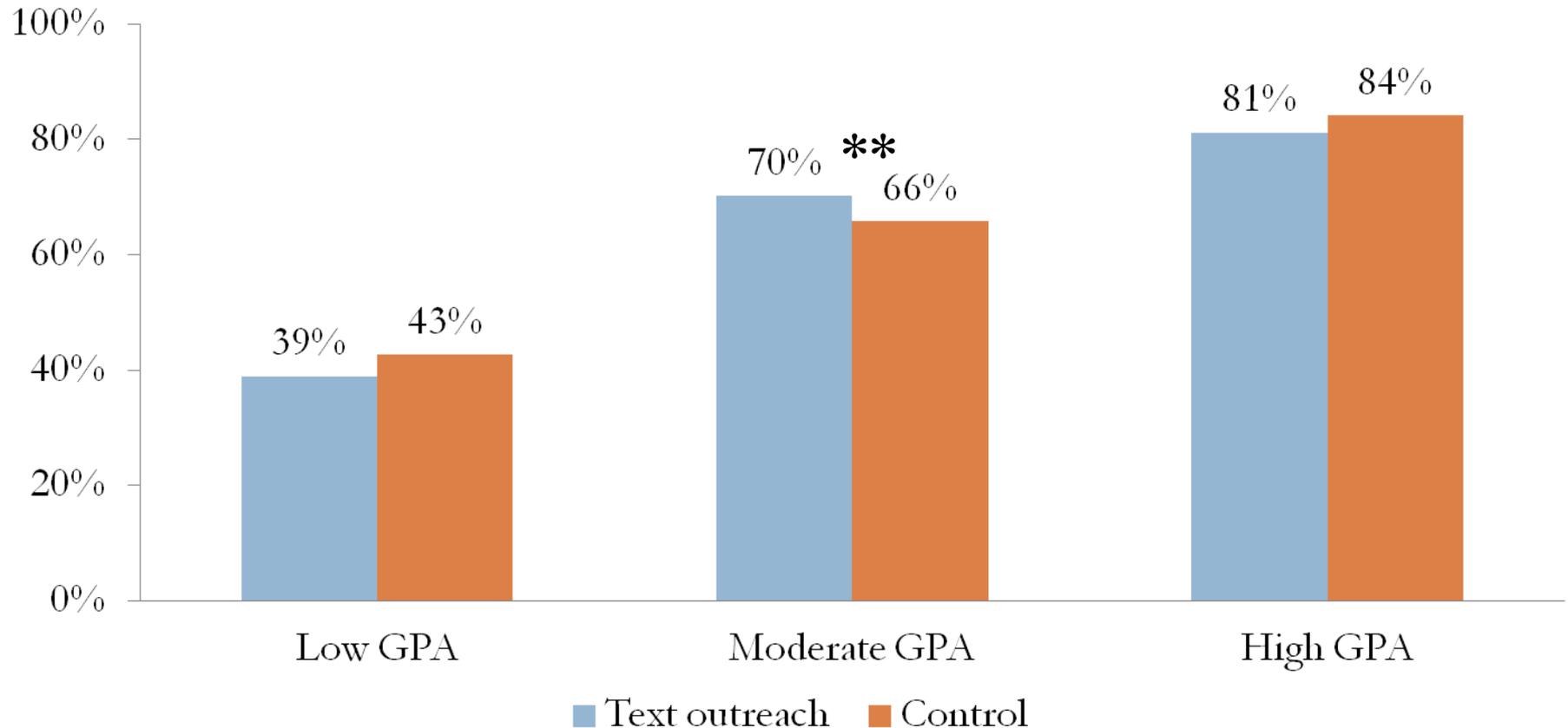


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# Impact of text intervention, by GPA

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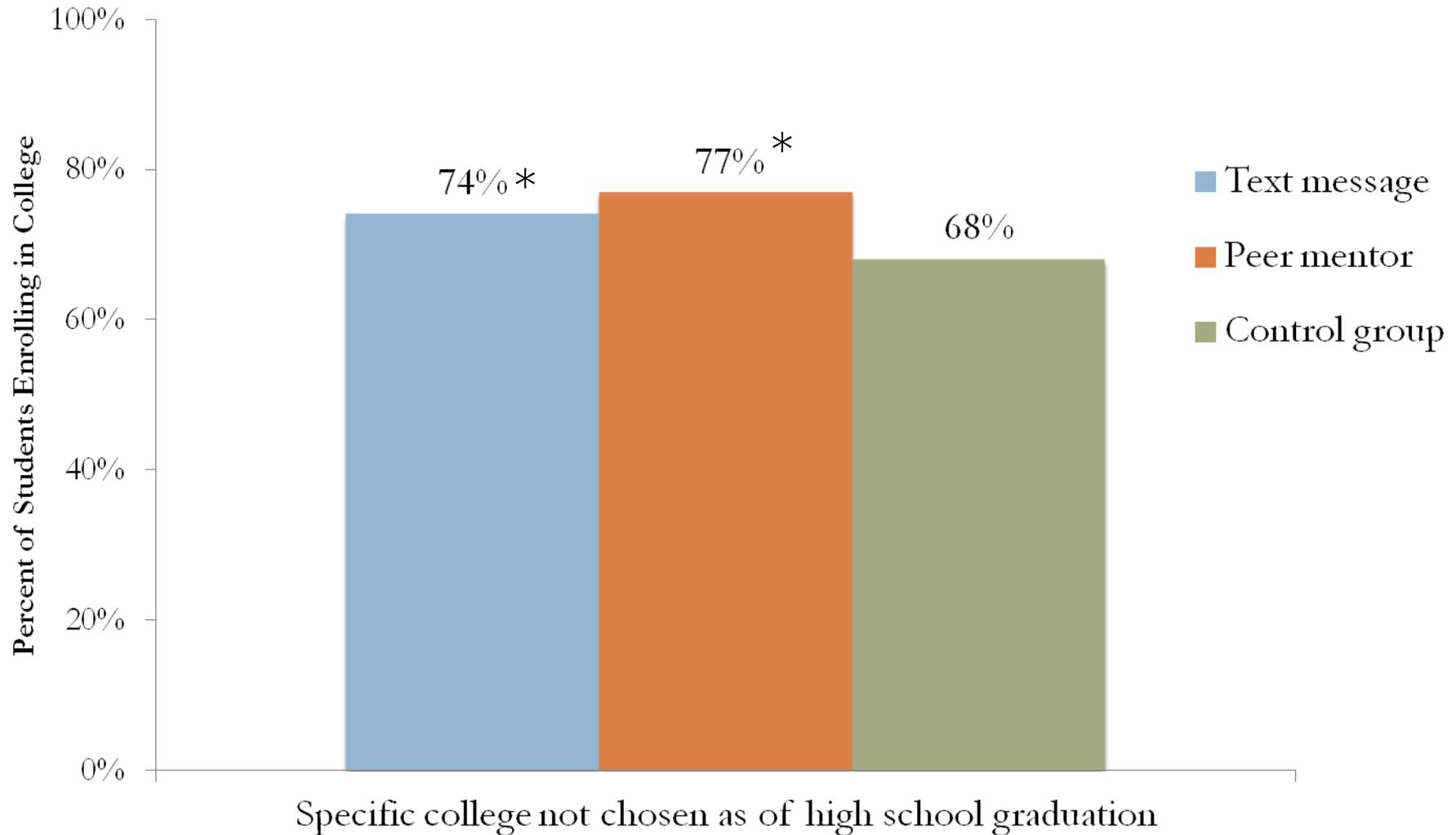
## Fall college enrollment



~ p < .10; \* p < .05; \*\* p < .001

# Impacts for those without college plans specified

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# Preliminary impact estimates for Austin

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- We are early in our analyses
- Preliminary results indicate that:
  - ▣ Both the text- and counselor-based outreach were beneficial for low-income students in the districts
  - ▣ Enrollment improved by 2 – 3 percentage points across the districts for a program cost of approximately \$21 / student
- We have more work to do to better understand where and for whom this summer support was particularly beneficial
- Continuing and expanding the effort could be both fruitful and informative for the Austin area

# Successful strategies identified by Austin counselors

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- ❑ **Build relationships:** lots of one-on-one interactions with students
- ❑ Devise a **summer “game plan”** for each student
- ❑ **Don’t give up:** continue to reach out (via phone and especially text) even if there is no initial response
- ❑ **Be encouraging**
- ❑ **Do it their way:** stay until whenever is necessary to catch students when they are available and reach out (text) at good times for the student
- ❑ **Assist with logistics** such as transportation to school

# Counselor feedback on summer melt interventions

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- Counselors felt well equipped to work with students and families through the summer
- “Summer melt starts in the winter” – start much earlier and identify key milestones even before graduation
- Continue to support students until move-in day
- Have flexible evening hours
- Add workshops that are institution and topic specific
- More guidance on appealing financial aid
- “Make sure this program continues – it works”
- Extend this program to more students

# Thank you

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